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THE DIVINE

LAW OF BENEFICENCE

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LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed  
to give than to receive.—Acts 20:35.

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## REQUEST TO PASTORS.

MY DEAR BROTHER IN THE MINISTRY—Having myself deeply experienced the varied benefits of a plan of systematic beneficence, feeling the adoption of such a plan to be the paramount duty of all who name the name of Christ, and believing, moreover, that adoption to be a thing full of hope for the church of Christ in her present crisis, I have determined to place a copy of this little work in the hands of every accessible pastor of all Protestant denominations in the United States and Canada. It is my hope, through their means, by the blessing of God, to draw the attention of Christians as widely as possible to the expediency and duty of making their contributions to the cause of God and of humanity, of Christ and his universal church, on *principle* and on *plan*.

Experience only, I am quite assured, is needed to convince all of the vast benefit and comfort to themselves, as well as of the vast power for good, of such a course earnestly adopted and consistently pursued.

May I not then ask *you*, fellow-laborer, to lend *your* aid to this movement. Through that aid much may be accomplished. Will you not give this little book a careful and a candid reading? Will you not take an early occasion to recommend *from the pulpit*, to the people among whom you are set to minister, the plan which it proposes? Will you not endeavor to persuade so many of your flock as may be possible, to make you

their agent in procuring copies of it for their own perusal? Will you not keep the idea before their minds by all appropriate means?

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gospel, and in the vineyard of Christ,

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# THE DIVINE LAW OF BENEFICENCE.

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## I. GOD'S DESIGN IN REQUIRING BENEF- ICENCE.

GOD is not dependent on us for the support of his poor. He could have so diffused the gifts of his providence as to have had no poor. Or he could so have fitted our frames to the world, and the world to them, that all the elements of human life and comfort would have been as abundant and free as air and water, so that, like the lilies of the field, the whole human race might meet every want without toil or spinning; and he might have published his gospel to every creature without our aid. He might have made his angels, in another sense, "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation." Or he might have written out the whole on the face of the heavens, and made them in a higher sense "declare the glory of God;" and made it in a higher sense true, that "their line is gone out through all the earth." He does not ask us to do this work or that, because of any dependence on us. He says, "Every beast of

the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry I would not tell thee, for the world is mine and the fulness thereof."

Whatever necessity there is of our agency he has purposely laid, in the present arrangement of things, *for our good*. His benevolence could have reached its object without our concurrence, if it had not made us also its object, and formed the design of blessing us in its course by enlisting us as coworkers. He knew that it was "more blessed to give than to receive." And when he put in motion the broad mechanism of his mercy, he put upon it laws of action and reaction, and made the work of heavenly charity, in all its branches, twice blessed—blessing him that gives, and him that takes. He laid on us a necessity of cultivating benevolent affections. If we could so arrange one's circumstances, and throw around him such influences, as to keep him habitually and constantly giving to the poor—if we could attach to him dependent relatives, or in some other way bring to act upon him a constant succession of calls that he would not resist, we should bring him under the best means of cultivating benevolent dispositions; and this is what God does with us, in laying on us this necessity of giving alms.

The fact that he could have published the gospel and fed his poor without us, while he could not, without our concurrence in giving, secure to us the blessedness which attaches to those that give, indicates



that his main design in laying on us the necessity of giving, was *to give scope to our benevolent affections*. For this end he has ordained that we shall have the poor with us always, in so many forms of human distress besetting our path, pleading at the bar of our conscience for the forth-puttings of that charity which is the high excellence of our nature. Yea, he has placed all the interest which we have in evangelizing the world on such a footing, that it will advance no further than his redeemed people pour forth the means of its advance; that in that forth-pouring the church may take in those riches of grace in which the whole work of redemption has its termination. In other words, he will not have the evangelizing of the world advance faster than the sanctifying of his church; and will sustain a reciprocal action between the two, advancing together.

Nor do we exaggerate in presenting this as the *main* ground of what necessity there is for almsgiving; for all the ends of redemption accomplished upon man are comprehended in his renovation from a state of supreme selfishness to that of perfect benevolence; and if we should say that all these occasions for benevolent action were created for the sole purpose of furnishing means of exercising men to benevolence, we should not make the means disproportionate to the end. The whole work of Christ, his humiliation, ministry, death, resurrection, and mediatorial government, the whole work of his gospel and

his Spirit, and all the enforcements of his providence look to this end. We speak therefore not without warrant, when we say that all the human suffering that now pleads for human charity, and all the heathen darkness that lingers upon the nations for human benevolence to enlighten, is suffered to exist, among other purposes, as a means of developing Christian character.

But let none imagine that *the necessity* for giving alms is on that account the less real. Divine wisdom has appointed it, and made it as unchangeable and imperious as if God himself were bound by it. The poor that God has cast upon the charity of men will inevitably suffer and die, if men do not feed them. The people that are perishing for lack of vision will continue to perish, until Christian men convey to them the light of life. God will not lay this work on men for wise reasons, and then send down his angels to take it out of their hands. It is by establishing such an order of things, and sustaining it after he has established it, that he gives reality and force to the motives to benevolence, and to the means of drawing out and strengthening benevolent affections. And all his purposes to secure the sanctification of his people and the whole ends of his redemption, will lead him to an inflexible support of this order of things.

The sum of the matter thus far is this, that God throws on us his poor, for the purpose of enriching us.

He sends the poor, as the representative of himself, and of the cause of his gospel, out to begging of us, and so, as it were, repeats the act of his humiliation, that the din of their solicitations ever sounding in our ears, and the sighs of a ruined world borne on every breeze, may draw forth from us those benevolent emotions and acts that shall more and more assimilate us to him "who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor." God takes the place of man: in his poor he asks, and man bestows; that in bestowing, man may accumulate the true riches—more precious than gold, which perishes. It is God himself who asks; and our enriching with grace is the end for which he asks. He asks in the only way in which he could test and exercise our benevolence. For this purpose he must needs ask as a beggar, and not as a king. Should he come to us in regal splendor or heavenly glory, his asking would be a command, which we should not dare to disobey; but our giving would be no act of compassion or benevolence. But now he comes to us in the person of his poor—he comes as the king dethroned and dependent—banished from heaven, covered with rags, pining in want—he comes uttering the tale of misery and real suffering, unless we afford relief. And now what we give is given by the promptings of compassion, and from no sordid motives. Here is both a proof and exercise of benevolence. Yet, to enforce his calls, he gives us to know that it is He that speaks and pleads for

compassion, through the open wounds and uttered agonies of dying men; and that every donation shall be acknowledged by him in person when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels, and say to every one who has exercised compassion on his poor, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me." It is not for his good but ours, that he thus begs himself, and pleads as a beggar before us. "Our goodness extends not to him." A wise father often draws out the dispositions of his child by bestowing gifts and then soliciting a portion in return, or getting proxies to solicit for him, anxious to open the child's heart to an expansive generosity. So Christ clothes himself in rags and casts himself on our compassion, for no purpose so much as to give us the reflex benefit of our own benevolent acts.

And here we wish it to be specially remarked, that this design appears prominent in the manner in which the duty of alms-giving is inculcated in Scripture. Like the other graces, this charity seems to be insisted on *for its own sake*—not because there is so much suffering to be relieved, but because it is good and right for us to engage in its relief. God will have us give, not of necessity, but from the spontaneous flowings of the heart. "Every man *according as he purposeth in his heart*, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." Almost in every instance, you will observe,

the duty is enforced from higher grounds than the fact that here is so much suffering to be relieved. In one case we are exhorted to "do good and communicate, for with such sacrifices *God is well pleased.*" In another, we are prompted to remember "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor." In another, the parity of reason drawn from the other graces is urged: "Therefore as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." In another case it is, "Freely ye have received, freely give." In another, "Give alms of such things as ye have, and all things shall be clean unto you," as if charity were the centre in which all virtues meet. When the poor Christians at Jerusalem were in great suffering, and the apostles went round to solicit relief of Gentile churches, their inspired letters, sent here and there, contained no rhetorical painting of the distresses to be relieved. In all that they said, there appears next to nothing adapted to draw upon the natural sympathies. In this work they seem to be laboring with a single eye to the sanctification of the Christians of whom they asked relief—as if no relief was wanted. The fact that God was to be glorified, and the hearts of men were to be sanctified, was their main argument. One of the most distinct references to the distress was this: "For the administration of this service not only

supplieth *the want* of the saints, but is abundant through many *thanksgivings to God.*" And here the revenue of praise to God is the great consideration absorbing the other.

Now, for a right appreciation of the views which we are to present, this fact, that man's sanctification for the glory of God is the main design of the scriptural provisions for alms-giving, and the main thing aimed at in the methods in which the Scriptures inculcate the duty, should be kept well in view ; for by overlooking it we have lost a principle that is the key to the understanding of this portion of the Scriptures.

## II. THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW OF CHARITY

From the foregoing remarks, it may appear that a habit of charitable giving holds a higher place in the divine method for saving a lost world, than most have realized ; and the Christian who is wont to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" may be expected to go to the Scriptures, not to find there the vague doctrine that he ought to be occasionally generous, and generally charitable, but something that will inform him why, and how he shall do it. And he will find that, both in the Old Testament and in the New, it is made a matter of distinct command, not that we shall do occasional acts of benevolence, when the appeal is too strong to be resisted, or the

public sentiment allows of no evasion, but that we shall enter upon *a series of periodical acts of self-denial for the good of others*; and thus sustain a system and fixed habits of giving. Whatever diversity there may be between the Old Testament and the New, they agree in this, that both, by express precept, require habits of periodical appropriations from our income to sustain religion and feed the poor. And they require that the habit of doing this should be as much a part of the character of the children of God, as the habit of prayer. They require a man not simply to hold himself in a position to be as it were forced to give now and then for the relief of distress, but to enter on the formation of an active character of beneficence, by keeping in constant flow a stream of bounties, lesser or larger, in proportion to his means.

Alms-giving did not originate with the Mosaic economy. There appears to have been a standing custom of giving gifts for religious ends, as an act of homage to God and benevolence to man, long before the Mosaic system was framed. Abram gave tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. The custom is fully recognized in the book of Job. Jacob at Bethel vowed to give a tenth. And the principle of giving gifts under religious obligation is doubtless as ancient as religion itself—coëval with that of sacrifices in the family of Adam. And this may account for the early and wide diffusion which



it had among all heathen nations. And though neither the customs of the patriarchal ages, nor the institutions of Moses are binding on us, they may serve to illustrate God's general plan of dealing with his people. He having his chosen nation before him in the wilderness, and about to enter upon the land flowing with milk and honey, put them under such laws as might bind them, as far as laws could bind, to a periodical series of acts that would counterwork their selfishness, foster their sense of dependence, and cultivate their love to God and man. These laws are found inwoven with the Mosaic ritual; and in their general design they concur with the New Testament law of charity. They required gifts to be made at stated times, often recurring, to insure the formation of the habit, and not to let the heart, opened by one gift, have time to close up before it opened for the next.

As to the amount required, there was as much definiteness as was needful to guide to a generous result, and as much as consisted with the other ends of the requirement; while room was left for the heart and conscience to play between different degrees of generosity. The nature of an act of charity requires some liberty of determining when and how much to give. If our Lord, after the purchase of our redemption, had written and hung out upon the skies a tariff, adjusting each one's tax for charities to his income, so that he might see at a glance that his



Redeemer required him to give just so many dollars and cents, he would have brought the requirement down to bind the conscience. But he would have constructed a system of *taxation*, rather than of charity. That would have changed the whole nature of the duty, and its whole influence upon the heart.

Two things were required in the law of charity: the terms must be specific enough to guide us to a course of habitual and generous giving; and they must be indefinite enough to allow us to show our heart, and give exercise to our love to God and man in what we give. And these ends were provided for in the Hebrew economy. The lawgiver seemed to have designed to set God's mark on the most common articles of property; so that while employed in his fields and with his flocks, and in gathering his harvests, each one should be constantly reminded of God's claims, and of his own obligation and dependence.

In the first place, each one was required to give the first fruits both of his flocks and of his field. The first fruits of the harvest were by custom a sixtieth part of the whole. Then money was to be paid as the ransom of the first-born male child. Then in reaping, the corners of the field were to be left for the poor; here also custom defined the requirement to be a sixtieth of the whole. Then whatever fell from the reaper's hand belonged to the poor. Then

every seventh year all the fields were to be left untilled, to produce spontaneously for the poor. Then a tenth of all the products of the fields was to be given to the Levites. Then there were trespass-offerings, sin-offerings, and specified portions of most of the sacrificed animals devoted to the priesthood and Levites. Then every seventh year all debts must be remitted; and the three yearly journeys to Jerusalem, which were required of all the males, at the festivals, must have been no small tax. Added to these were the half shekels for the sanctuary, and abundant hospitalities and gifts for the poor. So that a conscientious Hebrew could hardly have spent less than one-third of his income in religious and charitable gifts.

Nor did this generous charity hinder the secular thrift of the people. It was so adapted to their welfare, spiritual and temporal, and so sustained in the providence of God, that the people were prosperous or straitened in proportion as they obeyed or disobeyed this law. When they honored the Lord with their substance, and the first fruits of all their increase, their barns were filled with plenty. When they robbed God in tithes and offerings, they soon found that they had robbed themselves. And both in giving such a law, and in its providential enforcement, God impressively taught that he would have his people respond to his gifts by large and systematic outlays from them. Call this law, if you please, one

of the rigors of the Hebrew economy which Christ has set aside. It rigorously bound that people to that course for the attainment of their highest good. It was really no burden, except when their transgressions involved them in the penalties of the breach of it.

The specific provisions of the tithe system have now vanished with the whole fabric of Hebrew institutions ; but the end for which it was framed has never for a moment departed from the mind of the Framer, and the general obligation to extend religion and feed the poor, by freewill offerings, was far from being set aside in the more full unfolding of the mercy of God in the gospel. In displacing the ancient ritual with a simpler and nobler economy, the gospel has given vastly higher enforcements to what was of moral and permanent obligation in the Hebrew religion ; and this is preëminently true of the substance of the ancient law of charity. Before the frame of Judaism was reared, the requirement for man to love God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself, was recorded on tables of stone, to stand unobliterated for all ages. Then came in Judaism, specifically defining in what forms that love should, under such institutions, have expression. But when Judaism passed away, the original law stood unimpaired, and the gospel came in, specifying other forms of expressing this love.

On the basis of the original law of love, the gospel

lays another specific law of alms-giving. The temple and its costly apparatus, its sacrifices and its army of priests are set aside, and with them many of the occasions for the gifts prescribed. But the provisions of the gospel bring in vaster occasions for the employment of the grateful offerings of redeemed sinners. The command to publish the gospel to every creature, and to feed the poor which we are to have with us always, brings upon the Christian world occasions as great and urgent as those of the old economy ; nor is there any intimation or ground of inference that the gifts of pious men under the gospel were to be more stinted than before. If the principle announced by Christ, that to whom much is given, of him will much be required, is applicable, a much more generous charity is required of us. There were many things in Judaism adapted to narrow the range of charity. It confined the view to one small nation, as the field of all benevolent operations. It gave no hint of the conversion of the world as a present duty. And yet, if a good man's charity, confined to such narrow bounds, was expected to consume one-third of his income, can less be expected of us whose charity is bound to embrace the world ? Not that the poorest of us are required to give as much ; but taking men of all conditions, who shall say that our average ought not to be as great ?

## III. THE NEW TESTAMENT LAW OF CHARITY.

Before we come to the direct inquiry, as to what is the specific law of the New Testament on this subject, it may be well to see how the law of gospel love, as written in the hearts of *the first Christians*, expressed itself in their conduct. In other words, we will notice the effects produced on the church, in this particular, by the setting aside of the Hebrew law; and watch the motions of the first converts to Christianity, and see if they understood the New Testament law of charity as requiring less than that of the Old. Charity, in the form of gifts to the needy, because it was a prime element of Christian character, was made one of the most prominent traits in those specimens of that character that were first given to the world. There was no result of the first outpouring of the Spirit, after Christ's ascension, which the historian records with more of zest and delight, than the remarkable spirit of individual sacrifice for the good of the whole. On no other trait of character does he so much expand his description. And after an interval of two chapters, he returns to it again, and gives us other particulars, as if here were one of the most surprising phenomena of the whole. But this was a specimen of Christian character in its first formation. And would any one gather from it, that the law of charity had contracted its compass in passing over from Judaism to

the gospel ; or that the spirit of love breathed less freely in the heart of a redeemed sinner under the clearer light and intenser quickening power of the new covenant ?

But a common misconception here intervenes, and robs us of the practical instruction of this luminous portion of Christian history. Most Christians, in determining their own duty, are wont to lay this wholly out of view, in the conceit that it is an instance of the practice of *the community system*, and of course impracticable for them. And it may be worth the while to devote a few paragraphs in rescuing this instructive portion of history from this perversion. If, by the community system, we understand the relinquishment of all private property, and consolidating the goods of all in a common stock, nothing like that resulted from the pentecostal revival. This appears from the fact, that the sequel of the history speaks of these and other Christians as being *in possession of their private property* after these scenes had passed away, and it gives us no trace of the common stock, nor of its managers, nor of any community of people gathered around it. Afterwards, Christians are casually spoken of as having their own houses, here and there, like other people ; as in the case of Mary the mother of John, Tabitha, Simon the tanner, and Lydia. Nor did Paul think of a community system when he said, "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his

own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

We have, then, no reason to believe that there was here a melting down of all individual property into a common mass, to be controlled by managers of the common fund; but that in laying the foundations of Christian institutions in the mother church at Jerusalem, and in meeting the wants of multitudes of strangers detained there long beyond their expectations, those Christians who had property submitted it to the free use of the whole, *as far as the existing occasion required*. This limitation is expressly inserted. "Distribution was made unto every man *according as he had need*;" but there was not an alienation of property beyond the present need. There was no actual formation of a common stock; but, for a limited time, there was a subsistence of the strangers upon the freewill offerings of those at home in Jerusalem. Peter, after this mode of action had been in use, makes an express acknowledgment of each one's right of property, by saying to Ananias, "While it remained, was it not thine own; and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" The assertion that they "had all things common," had a parallel in this Pythagorean proverb, "With friends all things are common." But the Pythagoreans did not mean by this, that among friends each one had not his own wife, children, property, profession, and business. Nor does the community of those first



Christians exclude such distinctions. The historian says, "Neither was there any among them that lacked; for as many as were possessed of lands sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet;" but to show that the sale of possessions went no further than *the wants of those that "had need,"* and that it was not a general and entire alienation of property, one person is named who actually gave up all, and one who pretended to have done it. One would not have been thus named, if the same had been done by all.

It is not asserted, then, that all gave up all their property, but that all subjected their property to a free use, so far as the existing occasions required. This fully justifies the broad terms of the historian. In a like sense, the disciples were said to have left all and followed Christ. Yet they neither alienated their estates, nor dissolved their families. For after that, Christ went to Simon's house, and found his family, even to his wife's mother, in it. After that, he taught in Peter's ship, and committed his mother to John's adoption and support—an act unmeaning, if John had no separate family nor means of support. And, after his death, the disciples seem to have returned to fishing in their own ships. Indeed, neither here nor in any other scripture, can we find a shred of a warrant for a community of goods. Such a system would nullify the whole law of alms-giving;



for, how can they exercise themselves in giving alms who have no property to give?

That development of the spirit of Christian charity, which was one of the greatest wonders of the pentecostal scene, was then no abnormal condition of the church, no production of a peculiar and temporary policy, but the natural unfolding of the Christian spirit, under the quickening influence of the Holy Ghost. It was nothing more than what would be required of *all Christians, in the same circumstances*. It was alms-giving, occupying the due relative position among the other Christian graces. It seems wonderful to us, because so strange to our present habits, so above our low conceptions of the duty. It involves no principle which cannot be shown to be universally binding. And as we pass from Hebrew institutions over into the first practice of Christian alms, we not only come into the sphere of a more expanded charity—a charity well escaped from confinement to a single nation, and going forth to embrace the world—but also find ourselves in a centre of light as to the duty in question.

In the first place, this example, vindicated from misconception, shows by what tenure the Christian holds his property. While those Christians had possessions of property, they had them "*as though they possessed not.*" Each felt that he had no claim to his own which could bar the claim of Christ. And

he let Christ fully into his houses, and lands, and possessions, as far as the need of his people would carry him. Here we have the germ of the all-pervading principle of Christian alms. That principle makes every holder of property a steward, not an original owner. That principle was here set up, in the first setting up of the Christian church, claiming deference as a fundamental law of Christ's kingdom, in the whole work of raising supplies for the sacramental host of God's elect, in the conquest of the world. And if this principle could now fully reassert its dominion in every Christian heart, both the church and the world would soon be transformed. New force would be given to the law of love in all its ramifications. Let professed Christians feel that they hold their property only as stewards, bound at any time to surrender it when the wants of the poor or of the church are such that the general good requires the surrender, and the church will speedily come in possession of the means for every conquest. Let all, then, who have perplexities and cases of conscience about the right use of property, come and solve all doubts, by adopting the simple principle of those first Christians, and have "as though they possessed not."

Another point of instruction in the example of the early Christians is, that the exigencies of *the church*, and of a *spreading gospel*, are not second to those of suffering humanity in their claims on charity.

The occasion for the pentecostal contributions was chiefly religious. Those converts were no paupers, nor beggars, but rather learners of the gospel, for the instruction of the world. They had come up to the annual festival of ingathering, as usual, with sufficient provision for their return. But, having themselves been gathered in, they found unexpected occasions to protract their tarrying. It was needful that they should "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Those were most busy and important days. For there were the germs of the church for a thousand cities and villages, sprinkled over the world. Jerusalem was the only centre of light where they could get the instruction and furniture of mind which they needed, to become radiating centres wherever they went. And the interests of the whole Christian cause required that these first Christians should tarry at Jerusalem long enough to get adequate instruction, and the baptism of the spirit of the gospel. For, at that time, all the Christianity in the world was there. Not a word of it had been written; not a preacher of it had gone anywhere else. And all these Christians must there abide, till they got an adequate idea of what they were to communicate to the world. These interests, in such hearts, being paramount to all others, extinguished, so far as any had need, all private claims to property. This first and sublime

instance of alms-giving, in the organized Christian church, was an instance of alms given for religious ends—for the spread of the gospel.

This instance also shows what a high position religious charity holds *among other Christian duties*. These men, after embracing religion in its transforming power, and then in its outward ordinances, are said to have attended to Christian instruction, prayer, and fellowship. And the next thing said of them is, that among these prime duties of the Christian life they exercised this remarkable liberality. This duty is not located out on some remote branch or twig of the system, where our habits have placed it, but in the very heart and centre. And it is dwelt upon, and repeated by the historian, as one of the most delightful and characteristic events of the whole. Surely the genius of Christianity, as there developed, has entered but poorly into our conceptions.

There is also instruction in the fact, that those Christians "*sold their possessions*" to raise money for the emergency. This is a hint to us, that the advantage of good investments of property must yield to the higher law of the necessities of Christ. Many cannot afford gifts proportionate to their means, because their property is so invested that they cannot command the ready money. And perhaps some unconsciously felicitate themselves that they have their funds hid away from Christ, and dream not of any obligation to change investments

of funds that are yielding good incomes, for any emergencies of charity. Yet here we see, that in the spring-time and primitive development of Christianity, men were of another mind.

You will next observe, that these gifts were all *free-will offerings*. Each one's right of property was respected; no law imposed a fixed rate of contribution, and none required the whole of any one's property. One, prompted by his glowing love for the cause, judged it to be his duty in his circumstances to surrender the whole. Here operated that principle which we have already noticed, leaving individual hearts to spontaneous action, and yet securing a generous action. So much for the Christian law of alms, as it appears on the first page of Christian history.

#### IV. LAW OF PERIODICAL ALMS-GIVING.

God's plan, in making the wants of the church and of the poor a lever to bring the hearts of Christians up to higher elevations and habits of benevolence, appears on every page of the gospel, but our purpose confines us to those passages wherein the Christian rule of alms-giving is presented in its direct and specific form. We need not a law of charity which is every thing in general and nothing in particular. We need that which comes as near to regulating the proportion of each one's income, as the design of alms-giving will allow. And this we have in 1 Cor., 16 : 1, 2.

“NOW CONCERNING THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS, AS I HAVE GIVEN ORDER TO THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA, EVEN SO DO YE. UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, LET EVERY ONE OF YOU LAY BY HIM IN STORE, AS GOD HAS PROSPERED HIM, THAT THERE BE NO GATHERINGS WHEN I COME.”

We have here, as we propose to show, a rule which binds all to the principle of setting apart, *every Sabbath, or at least statedly, a portion of their income or their means of living, as God shall prosper them, for charitable uses*: it being understood, that this, like all other rules of its class, binds in its general principle and intent, but is subject to modifications in its details, when brought to individual application. Even the law of the Sabbath, uttered in the broadest terms, bends in adjustment to cases of needful mercy. And though the rule here given is as universal in its terms, it does not of course bind those who have no income to set apart a portion of income. Nor does it bind the man whose salary or means of living is received annually or quarterly, or the merchant engaged in large adventures, or any one who cannot know at every week's end what his income has been, actually to set apart a weekly proportion of income. But it would seem to require that every one should have his stated seasons for a conscientious apportionment to his charity fund, either in cash or by entry on a benevolent account, according to his circumstances, and in such a mode as he shall see fit

to adopt. The intent of the rule cannot be answered without *some form of stated, systematic action*. Each one is required to adopt some regular system of charity which shall come within the spirit of the rule; and it seems to have been a prominent design of the Lawgiver to put each one upon the exercise of his own judgment and conscience, in the execution of the general provisions of his law.

For illustration, and for suggestion to those who cannot devise for themselves a better mode, we here state the method in which two persons, unknown to each other, and in circumstances widely different, have fulfilled their own idea of this rule, with benefit, as they believe, to themselves and to the cause of Christ.

One, every Sabbath evening at the hour of his private devotion, lays aside the sum which he thinks he ought to devote for that week to charitable purposes. If he has not the money, he charges the amount against himself in favor of his charity fund. When there is a call for donations, he takes from this fund what he thinks he should give. If a call of special urgency comes, which what he has set apart will not fully meet, he overdraws the fund, and charges against it the balance, to be cancelled by future incomes. Thus in a very simple and easy way the work is reduced to a system, in connection with the spiritual exercises of the Sabbath.

The other is a prosperous merchant, who resolves that whatever his future profits shall be, he will de-



vote a certain per cent. to charity, enlarging the percentage if his profits shall exceed a certain sum. On the first day of every month he takes an inventory, ascertains what have been his profits, and credits the percentage on his charity account. When calls are presented, he draws from this fund ; and for some years he has been surprised to find that it is so productive. He meets calls with pleasure, and is a happy man in prayer and labor to obtain means, of which not a stinted portion is sacredly consecrated to God.

But to return to the passage before us : the first point of instruction here presented is, that *this rule is not given as mere advice*, which we are at liberty to disregard. Paul says, "I have given *order*" to this effect. Nor was it a rule framed for mere local and temporary use. He had imposed it before on the Galatian churches, and now lays it on the Corinthian church, whose circumstances were very different ; and it was laid in imperative terms by an apostle speaking by inspiration.

The next point is, that it is not a mere exhortation to benevolence in general, *but a specific rule requiring action in a particular way, and binding alike on all*. True, it has, like the command to preach the gospel to every creature, been lost to the church for a thousand years. Yet man's neglect cannot annihilate God's command. That it was intended for all is fully apparent. The epistle is addressed



not to the Corinthians alone, but "*to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ.*" This is not a mere unmeaning salutation. Paul could not have saluted all Christians in his epistle in such terms, unless he intended to address to them all, the instructions contained in it, so far as they were in nature and form applicable to all. And no part of his epistle is more capable of general application than this text. Nor does this rule here come out in a solitary instance in Paul's teaching. The same which he here gives to the Corinthians, he had given, in more than one instance, to other churches—"to the churches in Galatia."

It is the way of the Spirit of inspiration to speak to the whole church, or the whole world, through a small company of immediate hearers. How comes it that Paul's letter "to the church of God which is at Corinth," with all its details of instruction, reproof, and correction in righteousness administered to them, should have been put forth as God's book of inspiration for the regulation of our heart and life? Every thing in that epistle which contains this rule, has as much of a special direction to those Corinthians, as this rule itself has. For instance, this same epistle contains directions about the discipline of the church, which all churches acknowledge as binding on them; yet they were given about a single case then existing there. It contains exhortations to purity of life, with a reference to impurities existing there. It gives

important principles touching the law of marriage, with reference to cases existing there. It gives the Corinthians rules requiring of them a support of their ministry, and instructions respecting the Lord's table—respecting the exercise of spiritual gifts, and the like. None have doubted that the instructions and rules given, on all these subjects, were as much intended for us as for the Corinthians; and a principle of interpretation that would set them aside from present use, would exclude all the epistles from the sacred canon, and indeed a greater part of the other scriptures, for the great body of scripture is written on the same principle; even the ten commandments, the eternal law of the universe, were uttered specially to one people, and grounded on the fact that God had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage. Scarcely one of the rules in this epistle is given out with as much formality as that before us; and such formal rules of conduct, given by inspired men claiming to speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and to speak to the few for the instruction of the whole world, may be taken as meant for all, unless there be found in their structure, context, or occasions, some implied limitation. But no limitations are here implied.

There is another question: Did Paul require these weekly deposits to be made, and appoint that there should be no gatherings under the impulse of his eloquence when he should come, in expectation that he

would in this way make *a larger collection for that time*? Evidently he was not providing for that single occasion, but for the permanent influence of an established rule. If for one occasion only, he would most naturally have ordered the gathering to take place after he had come and exerted the force of his eloquence upon them in setting forth the details of the distress which he asked them to relieve. Who that knows with what force Paul could speak—how he spoke on Mars-hill, before the assembled wisdom of Greece—how he thundered in the ear and conscience of the hardened Felix—what effect he wrought upon Agrippa—who can doubt, that for a single collection, he would have secured vastly more if he had said nothing of weekly deposits, and had relied upon an appeal to the Corinthians with the electric force of his eloquence, backed by the moral force of his apostolic character and presence? It is clear, at a glance, that his object in giving that order, could not have been to get the greatest amount of money for a single occasion; and if not, it follows that he was looking to *permanent results*—forming the general practice of alms-giving in that church; and if in that church, why not in all churches?

If, then, the rule given have an evident fitness for universal application—if the circumstances of those for whom it was first made, show no reason why it was more fit for them than for all—if, from reason and the nature of things, the rule appears to be as

well adapted to all as to any, the case is clear that this utterance of the divine oracle is the voice of God to universal man.

And let it be well considered that all that is shown in this discussion, of the fitness of this rule for the cultivation of the divine life, and enlarging the streams of Christian beneficence, is so much in confirmation of its claims to be considered a law of God requiring your obedience; and if it be such a law, you are as much required to act according to it, as you are to keep the Sabbath. And those professing Christians on the continent of Europe, who ignore their obligation to remember the Sabbath-day and keep it holy, have no more occasion to review their theory touching that law, than you have yours respecting this. They are no more offenders against the one law of God, than you are against the other; and the Christian minister, or Christian teacher in any sphere, who neglects to inculcate this rule, as really neglects his duty, as the teacher who neglects to inculcate the law of the Sabbath.

The next point is, that *alms-giving is a work for every Sabbath*. "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store." Here nothing is said for or against collections made in the church on the Sabbath. The command is, that as often as the Sabbath comes, we should take out of our means of living a portion, and devote it to charitable uses. And this, in its very terms, refutes one

of the commonplaces of Christian penuriousness. that the handling of money is a desecration of the Sabbath, and the preaching about filthy lucre is a profanation of sacred things; for here is an express command of God, to handle money for one purpose on the first day of the week. It would seem that the first Christians had such a type of religion, that their handling of money was indispensable to Sabbath sanctification, and that their Sabbath prayers and praises could not ascend, but as accompanied with their alms.

Another penurious maxim is also set aside by this text, to wit, that calls for charity are *too frequent*. Enterprises of Christian philanthropy are so multiplied and various, that scarcely a month passes without a call from Christian pulpits for new donations, and this is quite an annoyance to those who have some conscience and less benevolence. Now this text points out a way in which this struggle between conscience and inclination can be forestalled. Let every one come into a habit of not waiting for any calls, but of setting apart every Sabbath, or at other stated periods, the portion which he ought to give, and he will experience no annoyance from the frequent calls of agents. Until he does this, he fails to come up to the apostolic rule as to the frequency of his alms. This is the way to "make up beforehand your bounty, that the same may be ready as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness."

It will naturally be asked, *Why this duty must needs be done on the Sabbath?* Whatever may have been the reason of this provision, it is a matter of fact, that the converted Jews had been accustomed to a like arrangement. Both Philo and Josephus inform us that the Jews were wont every Sabbath to make collections at their synagogues, of their tithes and spontaneous gifts, to be sent to the temple. This custom was adopted into the Christian church, with such modifications as the new dispensation required. The appropriation required to be made at home, irrespective of a church contribution, would secure a more universal compliance, than if it was to be made in the church from which some would be detained; and yet it did not hinder public collections, when convenience required them.

One of the reasons for connecting alms-giving with the Sabbath doubtless was, to secure *the periodical and constant action of the heart* in the work. To make this action sure, a particular day of the week is named when it should be done, and when it would be less liable to be crowded out of mind by other cares. And this order being obeyed, the habit of frequent giving is secured. The mind as often as the Sabbath comes round, is put upon reviewing the course of providence, and the prosperity experienced, and deciding in view of it how much ought to be given, and so is kept in the constant exercise of benevolence, and holding constant checks on avaricious

aspirations. So this employment, while it secures its main end upon the heart of the giver, harmonizes with all the other employments of the Sabbath. For the sanctification of the soul in its Sabbath work, it is required, not only to bring the mind under the quickening influence of the gospel, read and preached and meditated upon, not only to engage it in acts of prayer and praise, but to enlist it in acts of love to man, and in conflict with selfishness. Our Sabbath religion must be not only a matter of thought and feeling, but of self-denying action. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day." This action, steadily and habitually sustained, plays upon the very citadel of our selfishness, which is the great enemy of our sanctification. our keeping up a sleepless warfare at this point, brings assistance to the other appropriate operations of the mind, and employs the whole mechanism of the soul in harmony with Sabbath engagements. And the constant repetition of small gifts does more towards a benevolent formation of heart, than the same amount given in larger sums at wider intervals.

Another reason is, that gifts so often repeated, most effectually *secure a large amount*. The rule, in its structure, bears an evident design to favor the poorer classes, and give them an effective share in the blessedness of benefaction. Living more from hand to mouth, they have not the means at hand, if they would, to make large donations, but by weekly



additions to their charity-treasure, they may produce a rich result at the year's end ; and in all this process of laying aside the little that they can spare, they are making just as much sacrifice and cultivation of heart, and of course doing as much towards the prime purpose of giving, as their wealthy neighbors who give ten times as much. The little sums thus laid aside fall into their place in the ordinary calculation of expenses, and are provided for at the same time with our meat and drink ; and in thus sharing, as it were, our daily sustenance with the poor, and bringing the toil-worn missionary, as it were, to eat at our table, we come into a most affecting form of communion with Christ, and all who love his cause, while we are taking the best course to enable us to make the most of our contributions from a slender income. Without some plan like this, the constantly recurring calls for things needful and superfluous would absorb our income, and for the most part exclude our charities. But were all who acknowledge the obligation to give at all, including old and young, rich and poor, to come under this rule, a vast increase of charitable funds would be realized.

The first application of this rule in its definite form, which we have on record, was to the churches in Galatia, in which *the poor* abounded. And then it was found to be equally suitable to *the wealthier* Christians at Corinth, situated amidst temptations to luxury and extravagance. At any rate,



it is at once adapted to operate kindly among the necessities of the humbler classes, and to hold salutary checks upon the extravagances of the rich. It brings each one, once a week, to a reckoning with himself as to his use of the gifts of Providence. Is there a Christian whose easily besetting sin is extravagance, who is spending more than a good conscience would dictate, in the matters of style, or in the elegances and superfluities of life, this rule would seem to have been made on purpose for him. It arraigns him once a week before his conscience and his God, to debate questions touching this very subject. Let him adopt the rule, and he is led at once to a course of mental exercises, in which he cannot retain both his peace of mind and his habits of extravagance. The Sabbath comes, and after engaging in the devotions of the day, both public and private, he sits down under the full impression of all he has heard and read of Christ and his salvation, and of all that he has himself uttered in his prayers and praises, and makes his decision as to how much the Lord has prospered him, and for what end, and what obligations that prosperity confers ; and he must be slow to admit reproof if some of his superfluities are not soon lopped off. If he fail to take the hint at first, this debate in conscience is of course renewed once a week, and he is brought back to the subject in all varieties of circumstances and modes of feeling, and if any thing can cure a Christian's habitual ex-

travagance, this must be the remedy. By imposing this rule, God, as it were, every Sabbath takes each Christian aside and puts to him the delicate question, how he has been prospered, and how much he can afford to give to Him from whom he receives all. And he does this at the time when the rational powers and spiritual affections may be supposed to be in the most vigorous exercise.

But there may be a more specific reason why this day, and not any other of the week, is set apart for this purpose. We may be invited to bring *our grateful offerings* to the Lord's treasury on this day, because the very design of the Sabbath makes it a day of thanksgiving and of grateful remembrance of the work of redemption. The Christian Sabbath celebrates a new creation as a subject of more elevated praise than that on which "the morning stars sang together." And it is fitting, that our grateful joy should have expression in substantial acts, as well as in words and songs. He who made the mind, and who best knows how to touch all its springs and cause us to make melody in our hearts to the Lord, knows that the giving of gifts is a natural expression of grateful joy, and that the incense connected with freewill offering, sweetly blends with our songs of praise for redeeming love.

Again, *the religious nature and obligations* of the duty of alms-giving, make the appointment of the Sabbath for the time of doing it, peculiarly proper.

The several Sabbath employments naturally aid each other. Prayer and praise quicken and elevate the mind for more effectual meditation on the word of God, and so all the fit employments of the Sabbath may tend to revive our sense of obligation, and our benevolent emotions, and thus serve as prompters to our acts of charity. The Christian mind as really communes with God, in the act of devoting to a charitable use a portion of the gifts of God, as in prayer and praise. God's authority binds the conscience, and the love of Christ constrains the heart to the act, and the mind moves responsive to the known will of Christ. Such acts are a proper expression of that charity of which Paul says, "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity." This is, then, one of the graces of the Spirit, and as the design of the Sabbath is for the quickening of grace, this grace should be called into action on the Sabbath; and as this grace is in many minds one of the most difficult of exercise, the aids which other Sabbath exercises give should be called in, and our prayers and our alms should go up together as a memorial before God. The fitness of this connection of things has illustration in the experience of ministers, who, after the exercises of the Sabbath, find their minds vastly quickened in forming conceptions of divine truth, and in all spiritual exercises.

*God has established* this connection between our Sabbath employments, and set the duty of alms-

giving high among them, doubtless with the design that it may have a more effective performance. A time has been chosen when the mind may be supposed to be in the most favorable posture, a time when we have retreated farthest from the world and its excitements to avarice, and are most susceptible of spiritual motives. If we wished to get a large donation from one, for some benevolent object, we should choose our time to approach him, and especially the time when the realizations of eternity were most upon him. Thus God does, and comes to us for our gift in the midst of our Sabbath devotions—in the midst of our professions of gratitude and love. He comes in and takes us at our word. We have perhaps been singing,

“All that I am, and all I have,  
Shall be for ever thine;  
Whate’er my duty bids me give,  
My cheerful hands resign.”

He then comes in with an opportunity for us to give what our duty bids; hence the admirable fitness of the time. If there is to be a set time, who will not say that *this is the time*? If it had been a universal custom to do this work on one particular day of the week, and that not the Sabbath, and if now a transfer were to be made, and the work were to be brought within the Sabbath, a great advance in the amount given would doubtless be realized. Even the merchant, who monthly or at other stated times

carries to a benevolent account the sum devoted to charity, may derive great advantage from setting apart on the Sabbath a little season for "grateful communion" with Christ in reference to the claims of the various departments of benevolence, and in prayer for direction and a blessing on his humble offerings.

Further, the duty is laid *on every one*. "Let *every one of you* lay by him in store." Though those who are themselves objects of charity and have nothing to give, would not come within the rule; and though those whose incomes do not admit of so detailed a distribution, would be allowed to answer the intent of the rule in the form which their circumstances require; yet, with such modifications, the rule is universal with rich and poor. If it be thought an objection that too much of religious charities must thus come from the gifts of the poor, we answer, it will not be so, provided they do not go beyond the measure of the prosperity which God has given them. Hitherto religious enterprises have been mainly sustained by the confluence of small streams, coming in from those in moderate conditions. Yea, it is one of the excellences of these enterprises, that they unite the hearts of rich and poor; and convey to the poor as much of the benefit of giving as to the rich. And will any count it treason to allow the poorest to share in the luxury of sending the gospel to the poor? Has not the gospel done enough for the poor to warrant

such responses of gratitude from them? Has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? And has he denied to these heirs of the kingdom all share in the work of advancing his kingdom? His order to the churches in Galatia, where the poor abounded, was, "Let every one of you lay by him in store."

Nor did he intend to impose a burden, but to confer a privilege. And he has so shaped the requirement, because unwilling to exclude the poor from a needful means of grace. He who was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, would not so frame his system as to cut off the poor from the channels through which he conveys the riches of his grace; and most impressive is the assurance which he has given us of this, in the value which he stamped on the widow's farthing. While sitting in the temple and watching the people casting their gifts into the treasury, and after some had made princely donations, he saw a poor widow come and drop in two mites, which made a farthing. That went to his heart; and with solemn emphasis in the use of that "Verily," or Amen, which only *he* ever used in such a way, he asserted that the value of the widow's gift exceeded the sum total of all the rest; and why? Because there was more of sacrifice made, more of benevolent heart expended, and so a deeper and richer participation of sanctifying experience had, which is the ultimate end of all gifts.

Here is presented such a scale of valuation of our gifts as brings the rich and poor upon one level, and puts to flight all reasons that would exclude the poor. Whatever others may think, Christ makes the smallest gifts of the poor as indispensable, and of as much value, as the large donations of the rich. Ever watchful for fit incidents from which to flash forth instruction upon all ages, he here seized upon a case of the smallest donation made by extreme poverty, and held it forth as our warrant to value all gifts according to the sacrifice made, and so make the gifts of the poor, not only as acceptable to God, but as valuable towards the ultimate end of filling the world with the glory of God, as the proportionate gifts of the rich. And so when he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," he intended not to utter startling paradoxes, but to declare a plain matter of fact in that divine plan which in many ways betrays a generous partiality to the poor, in the distribution of spiritual favors; and to sustain this partiality, he must give the poor an equal share in the blessedness of giving, and this, and even more than this, they have ever had.

But if it be a general law of Christ's kingdom, that gifts in charity weigh in the balance of the sanctuary according to the amount of the sacrifice made, the concurrence of those of the smallest income is indispensable. Suppose you can give but a cent a week, that shall introduce you to all the soul-enrich-



ing influences of giving. As an instrument of communion with Christ, and of binding your soul to him, your copper coin is as effectual as the gold of others. And who can tell, that carrying a special blessing with it, and guided to its result by the partial regards of the Redeemer, it may not actually produce more than the larger gifts, made with less sacrifice and prayer? Cases are not wanting of the single penny-tract having originated trains of light and salvation, branching forth and extending beyond human computation. And who can tell that these small grains of mustard-seed, that have produced the great trees, have not come from those whose "deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality."

Make the small gifts of the poor a matter of indifference, and confine to the rich the obligation to give, and you would render the whole commandment a nullity. If God had left to *all but the poor* the command to give, this would have been a poverty-stricken world. To make it of any effect, it must run impartially from the highest to the lowest. It must hold the pence as carefully as the pounds.

Indeed, imperfectly as this rule has been understood, the greatest aggregate of gifts has come from those of more limited means. Never did charities more abound than in the primitive ages; never did evangelizing go forward with greater rapidity and power: yet, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called." It was the



gifts of the humbler classes, flowing in countless minuter rills, which cut the channels to convey the riches of salvation over the civilized world. That broad and fertilizing shower that in the space of one generation made the wilderness bud and blossom as the rose, was composed of single drops. And so is every other shower. He who is the Father of the rain, and who begets the drops of the dew, finds it not beneath him to produce the single drops and the smallest drops, without which there can be no showers. Sometimes when the ground, under a scorching sun, is opening the seams on its bosom, imploring from heaven the mercy of a shower, a thin cloud comes over, dispensing a large drop here and there—a fair similitude of what the work of charity, confined to the rich, would be. The drops are large and generous in themselves; but they are too few, and do but mock the distress. It is the constant distilling of the small rain by which God gladdens the earth.

And this law of charity lays itself on men in all varieties of condition, with an admirable equality of pressure. It requires each to give *according to his means, and according to his own judgment, formed with an enlightened conscience and a benevolent heart*. It puts into the hands of each one a scale of duties, ascending and descending with the increase or decrease of his means. The poor man is expected to “labor, working with his hands, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”

If this rule presses heavily anywhere, it is on those who have difficulty in meeting their urgent wants from week to week. But even they could make a cent a week sacred to the cause of benevolence, without any sensible increase of their burdens; and that for them might answer all the ends of the requirement, and make them equal co-partners in the soul-enriching and world-enriching commerce of benevolence. But to an amount lesser or larger, each is bound to form the habit of giving a portion of his income—to act every week on the question of apportioning his gifts to his income. Among the duties of the Sabbath, comes that of dividing off a portion for alms. And this is a duty no more to be forgotten than that of prayer. The act involves an exercise of conscience and of heart—of love to God and man, in giving back a portion of God's gifts. The Sabbath's sun invites you anew to settle the question, how much you ought to deny yourself for Him who gave his life for your ransom.

The flexibility of this rule is one of its advantages. *It bends in perfect adjustment to each one's circumstances*, and to all changes of circumstances. It does not require, that one shall, at the beginning of a year, commit himself to give so much for the year, not knowing whether his present ability will continue through the year, or whether it may not be increased; he may determine on the proportion, or percentage of income which he will contribute, and that, if his

income shall exceed a certain sum, he will give a larger percentage, "as God shall prosper him." It does not require each one to give just so great a proportion of his income; but it makes each one to judge for himself, in view of all his circumstances. There may be circumstances which would require one to give twice the percentage of his income which another gives. One may be under obligations to creditors, and bound to be just before he is generous; while the other, with the same income, is free from debt—though the man who early adopts and adheres to the scripture rule, will find it operating as a powerful dissuasive from contracting needless debts. There are a thousand other circumstances which may vary the proportion that different persons ought to give; and these are wisely committed to be judged of by each one's own conscience.

There is still another important point of instruction in this text: "*That there be no gatherings when I come.*" This detects a capital error in our present policy of benevolence; in that we are wont to wait to be lashed up to our duty by the periodical visits of the agents of the several benevolent societies. Paul was operating as an agent for gathering funds to relieve the distress of Christians at Jerusalem. But he did not tell the Corinthians, Wait till I come and lay before you the thrilling details of that distress, and by dint of eloquent appeals, move you to

an amount of donations which you would not otherwise reach. He placed no reliance on such means. He preferred that all should be done without a word from him. He would have every dollar that was to be given, actually in the treasury before he came, "that there be no gatherings when I come." This uncovers a grand feature in the divine plan, and it may show us the error in our policy which makes it so hard to bring the churches up to this duty. We begin at the wrong end. We make the great reason why we should give to be, that somebody will suffer if we do not. And we depend on our agents to set forth that suffering, with an energy of eloquence which those only can command who give themselves wholly to a single branch of the work. And the result is, that the main spring appointed to move the soul to this work, is left untouched. The animal passions and natural sympathies are quickened, the understanding is convinced of the fitness of the work, and the justice of its claims upon us; in a secondary sense the religious affections are enlisted; but the whole energy of the heart is not roused, because we do not place the main reliance on the main motives. We wait for Paul to come first, and tell us all about the sufferings of the poor saints at Jerusalem; expecting by that communication of intelligence, to be led into the great and moving inducements to give.

But Paul just reversed this process. He relied on the intelligence of higher and more moving facts,

which had already been communicated to them. He reminded them of their obligations to Christ, who had given himself for them—of the fact that they had already “given their own selves to the Lord,” which gift involved all the donations that were needed from them; he reminded them that he was proving the sincerity of their love—that he was seeking the cultivation in them of one of the parent graces—that all their supplies came from God, who would cause them to reap bountifully from a bountiful sowing—and that the great end which he sought, was *the enriching of their souls “to all bountifulness.”* These were the motives on which he relied. His great care was, not to stir their sympathies in view of the distresses of the needy, but to make those distresses an occasion of their exercising one of the Christian graces. And this he did by reminding them of their relations to God and Christ. His argument was purely evangelical—made out of the prime elements of the gospel. He was thus saved the necessity of descending to lower themes. He put the Corinthians upon the formation of habits of giving constantly and from principle, and so secured the gifts in actual preparation, when call should be made for them.

Now, so far as our present system has departed from this principle, we shall sooner or later be compelled to retrace our steps. There has long been with many, a desire to save the necessity of employing agents in the collection of funds; and yet, there

has been a prevalent conviction, that in the present condition of the churches, they could not be safely dispensed with. Most experiments of dispensing with them have resulted unfavorably. And it is plain, that any change of the temper and habits of the public mind, that will warrant our dispensing with them, must have a gradual introduction. If we are not mistaken, that change, so much desired by all—and by none more than by our most efficient agents—can be secured by the restoration of this rule of alms-giving, and by our ministry returning to the scriptural method of inculcating the duty. If a display of facts and statistics, and the communication of intelligence respecting the particular charity for which the agent pleads, is to be the great lever to lift the church up to an apprehension of its duty, then we shall ever want agents to do the work. But if the more excellent way be found to be, to bring the obligations to bear on Christian hearts first and mainly for their own sanctification, then the regular ministry will be the best of all agencies. And while we find it necessary to employ agents, they will find it for their advantage to take a standpoint nearer the heart and centre of the gospel, and make less reliance on their facts, statistics, and pathetic appeals. The nearer they come to the plan of Christ and his apostles in this matter, the more effective will be their command over the hearts of their hearers. Their main endeavor should be to dig

broader and deeper fountains of benevolence in the heart of the church, and not to eke out the largest possible stream from the shallow fountains that now exist.

There is then great wisdom in that single stroke of the inspired pen, "*that there be no gatherings when I come.*" It tells us, that our gatherings have been so meagre, because not before prepared in habits of giving, and in affections of the soul previously cultivated under the application of motives more purely evangelical. And it reveals a capital error in our present mode of action, and shows the remedy for existing deficiencies. Let the work of charity be taken up, like that of repentance, to be done *because it is right*, because the wants of the soul require it, because it is due from us as homage to God, and in gratitude to Christ. Let the ministry urge it on these grounds *mainly*, and let the great themes of redemption come to bear on the heart in a way to enlarge its fountains of benevolent feeling, and the result will be most happy.

Thus have we endeavored to give the spirit of Paul's injunction, to engage in alms-giving every Sabbath. In this we show a definite rule, formed by divine wisdom, binding by divine authority, requiring us to sustain a constant habit of giving more or less according to our means, and independently of particular calls; and so as to be beforehand, and ready for them when they come. This rule we propound to



every one, as claiming his obedience. It is as definite and authentic as any of the rules by which the revenues of the Hebrew church were gathered.

But you will perhaps plead, that it has become obsolete; and say, that it has for many centuries been unknown to the Christian world. And so have many other things, which are as clear as the sun when attention is effectually turned to them, been unknown to the Christian world. The great duty of evangelizing the world, which is in some sense the sum of all duties, has, till within a short time, been buried from the sight of the church. The command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." stood plainly forth on the inspired page. It was "read and conned by rote" among the lessons of childhood. It was a theme for the pulpit and the commentary. But it was but yesterday when its true meaning, simple as it is, began first in modern times to flame forth, and awake the hearts of a slumbering church. And it is nothing more strange, that this other command, written by an apostle, clear as a sunbeam, has slumbered so long.

Facts compel us to open our Bibles with the impression, that the church is committing some great error somewhere, in her practical sense of her duty, as to furnishing the means of evangelizing. There must be something out of joint. Some principle to which God has committed a moving power, is dis-



located and bereft of its power. And previous to examination, who can say that the oversight has not been committed on this very page? The language is plain, binding every one to make alms-giving a matter of business, of habit, and part of his Sabbath work. And the fact that all Christians have so strangely overlooked this duty, is by no means a solitary fact. Nor can the united vote or non-user of all Christendom, vacate such a Christian duty. Remembering what a new impulse was received when the church began to recover the meaning of the command to evangelize the world, let us seek to recover the force of the command which binds us to furnish the means of that evangelizing.

Such is the law of the New Testament, binding us to interweave with our Sabbath-keeping, a constant habit of consecrating to God a portion of our means of living. We pass now to some reasons for a compliance with this law.

#### V. REASONS FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAW.

##### 1. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MEANS OF GRACE.

This we place first in order, because it is the first in importance. We have shown, that all other ends of alms-giving terminate in this; and that the duty, in Scripture, is enforced chiefly on the ground of its being a means of sanctification to the heart of the giver. We have shown, that it is indispensable to

the growth of Christian character, that Christian beneficence have exercise; that it has been appointed that we shall have the poor with us always, as the means of exercising us in those habits which will promote us to true riches. If God's poor suffer, or if God's cause suffer, it is to give scope for cultivating the graces of those who exercise compassion. So when the poor saints at Jerusalem were in distress, and claiming the compassion of gentile Christians, the apostles were with divine skill making their sufferings an occasion of growth in grace to others.

See how Paul uses the occasion with the Corinthians: "Therefore as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound *in this grace also.*" Here, this grace, which has exercise in alms, is set into one and the same family with faith, love, and Christian diligence. And the same reasons why we should abound in one, are made good reasons why we should abound in the other. This branch of benevolence is here recognized *as a grace*. And what is a grace, but one of those qualities of mind, gratuitously imparted by the Spirit of God in regeneration, and put forward in sanctification—one of those qualities which make out the Christian character? It is one of a sisterhood that is never separated from the rest. Those who think that they can be good Christians, and have nothing to do with charities—those who abound in verbal faith and or-

thodoxy, and in fluent prayers, while they are deaf to all calls to give for the love of Christ, are strangers to the power of godliness. The Spirit of God never committed such an oversight, as to regenerate a soul and then leave it under the power of covetousness complete. The product of the new birth is a new man, with all the members of a man developed; and not one mutilated and wanting in this or that limb. Every grace of the Spirit has a proportionate, though it may be a feeble development. And it would be no more absurd to speak of a Christian without faith, than of a Christian without beneficence. A Christian infidel is no more a contradiction in terms, than a Christian without charity.

True and healthy piety involves in itself an advance of the several graces in fit proportions, as the growth of the body advances in all its several limbs. And to say that such a one is an earnest Christian in every thing else, but that he will give nothing and sacrifice nothing for the cause of Christ, is an abuse of language. Of such a one the Scripture says, "How dwelleth the love of God in him?" When we see large developments of Christian character in other respects, connected with small developments of benevolence, the large must be taken with some allowance—keeping good the principle, that as ye abound in the other, ye will "abound in this grace also."

This grace has its root in our *self-consecration to God*. For the apostle in the same connection, en-

forcing this grace from the example of liberality in the churches of Macedonia, says, they "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us by the will of God." Here is the beginning of all charity. The man ceasing to live to himself, and beginning to live for God, asks himself, not how shall I most successfully rear a separate and selfish interest; but how shall I best employ my means, great or small, towards the true end for which I live? He has in his soul a propensity to acts of Christian generosity; and this propensity is the grace that is to be cultivated in harmony with the rest.

This propensity has its main impulse in the love of Christ. As Paul intimates in the same connection, it "knows the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." In every gift, the Christian, acting as a rational being, has a reason for his act. And though he may not have analyzed his feelings, so as to be conscious of it, his chief motive is, that he acts in harmony with the will and benevolent design of the Saviour, who embraced poverty to confer on the redeemed the riches of heaven. The loss which he is to incur by his gift, reminds him of the amazing loss by which Christ bestowed on him an unspeakable gift. When his selfishness begins to rally, and he is half resolved to withhold his reasonable share in any good work, the thought comes back, that He who

was rich in all the wealth of heaven, emptied himself of all, and had not where to lay his head, that he might hereafter have a house of many mansions to open, and an inheritance incorruptible to make over to him. Seeing what Christ has done and lost for him, to confer the wealth of the eternal God as a free gift, and seeing that all he demands in return is the natural response of a grateful heart, he becomes ashamed of his best gifts, and says,

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

If such a thing could be, as a redeemed sinner inflamed with the love of Christ, and now and then lifted to rapturous elevations and well-nigh mingling with the white-robed harpers before the throne, in that song, “Worthy is the Lamb,” and yet this same redeemed sinner with a heart of stone against every appeal to benevolent feeling, he would be a monster for which we have no name.

Thus the same motives which actuate every other grace, are the motives to this; and these may all be reduced to one, *the love of Christ constraining us*. It is as important that this love should have expression in this form, as in other appropriate forms. And this grace, like the rest, grows by exercise—by bringing the motives to bear, and calling it into frequent action. That the love of God may be called

forth and cultivated to be a strong and permanent principle of character, it is made our duty to be much in acts of prayer and communion with him. So also, that our benevolent affections may have strength, it is made our duty to hold ourselves to constant repetitions of benevolent acts. For this reason, divine wisdom has appointed that each Christian shall enter upon a series of such acts, and hold himself to them while the weeks and years go round, that he may bring to bear upon his soul a divinely constructed mechanism, for its gradual transformation into the divine image. You have then the great reason for this rule of habitual and systematic charity, in that it is the will of God for your sanctification—in that it is among the most important means of grace.

And that it may still further appear to be such, let us contemplate it in the opposite view—in the antagonism which it presents to the native *covetousness of the heart*. That which most effectually promotes our benevolent affections, best counterworks our avarice; for our evil affections are displaced only by bringing in their opposites. And these habits of constant giving are prominent among the means which God has appointed for our habitual resistance to that love of the world which is idolatry, and that lawless *will to be rich* which involves us in a “snare, and in many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

The purpose to accumulate money for its own

sake, or for the selfish gratifications which it ministers, when once admitted to rule the mind, *takes possession* and spreads and fortifies itself, and leaves no place in the heart for homage to God. Every power of the soul submits, as if smitten with a palsy. All motions are excluded that do not obey the impulse of this ruling passion: the understanding cannot entertain the thoughts of God, for it is tasked to its utmost in gainful contrivances; the memory is imbecile as to all remembrance of God, for its main power is exhausted upon other things. The affections are so occupied with treasures of earth, that they set no value on the pearl of great price. In short, this love of accumulation is the easily besetting sin of the world, and one of the most dangerous enemies of our salvation; and the strategy of our spiritual warfare needs to be specially directed against it.

Selfishness is the parent form and central element of all sin; and *the love of money* is one of the main branches of selfishness, "the root of all evil;" and upon this "root of all evil," this dangerous enemy of our salvation, the enginery of redemption is made effectually to play, in the formation and nurture of habits of benevolence. Aware that this was our great point of danger, Christ said to them that "trust in riches," that is, them that come under the power of this love of money, that it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for them to enter heaven. And having given command to take heed



and beware of this covetousness, he has also shown the way of resisting it, by bringing the benevolent affections into vigorous and constant play. The Christian law of alms-giving he has made to give a benevolent character and a sanctified direction to our necessary employments for gain.

He who, out of a principle of true benevolence, consecrates to a benevolent use whatever can be wisely spared from his income, and possesses the rest as though he possessed not, holding it as God's steward, does in fact write "*holiness to the Lord*" on all that he acquires. In all his labor of acquisition he is as much actuated by a benevolent design, as if he were laboring with the intent to give every cent of his gains to the poor; and in all his labors he is as much accepted of God, and is doing as much for the sanctification of his own heart, as if—his own and his family's support being provided in other ways—he was laboring exclusively for God's poor. Accordingly the apostle says, "Let him that stole, steal no more; but let him labor, working with his hands, *that he may have to give to him that needeth.*" Here, it is not labor to supply his wants, or support his family; but he must be actuated by a design which looks beyond these, while it embraces them both. The adoption of this principle of laying off the Lord's portion from our income, if done from right motives changes the whole direction of our labor for gains, and enables us to "do it heartily as unto the Lord,"



to make his glory the end of our ordinary employment ; and this inverts the whole machinery of the mind, that had before labored to accumulate for selfish gratifications.

Most have need of the diligent pursuit of some methods of gain, as the means of living. They are put upon constant toil and care to keep up their supplies ; and they make more or less acquaintance with anxious solitudes about the future. This experience will operate to promote inordinate desires to be rich : the details of gathering cents and dollars by the hardest, for subsistence and for children's bread, tend to form habits of inordinately desiring riches ; and these habits, with no counteracting force, would soon fearfully contract the heart.

Then the multiplicity of cares which come upon one devoted to worldly accumulations, and the keen solitudes employed on money-adventures, are so exhausting to the benevolent affections, so adapted to fix an undue value on money, that we need, for our own safety, all possible *engagements of mind in opposite directions*. No apology for neglecting the soul is so much in use as that of the multiplicity of cares, the want of time occasioned by labors and enterprises for gain. Risks must be run ; the issue of pending adventures must be anxiously waited ; new plans must be framed ; the eye must be out on all turns of times and shifts in the currents of business. Alternations of hope and fear, of success and disaster,

must keep the mind upon a stretch. And here is the occasion for the action of some counteracting element ; for this is the reason why the gospel, preached to anxious worldlings, is a precious seed thrown away among thorns. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word ; they follow a man like his shadow, engrossing his thoughts, absorbing his soul, even while his body is in the house of God.

Now the more one is exposed to this deluge of cares, all tending to put forward the growth of selfish affections, the more he needs that method of counteraction provided in the divine rule under consideration. The mind acting so much in one direction, needs to regain its health and balance by much action in the other ; and God has interposed to bring relief to this point of danger, and laid on us the duty of combating our love of money by making sacrifices of money. In this way he engages us to put one of our greatest enemies to the torture, and crucify him till he dies. This is a main branch of that great duty of mortifying the flesh with its affections and lusts : we give our love of money a new wound as often as we make a sacrifice in a gift to the poor. It comports with the economy of grace, that our giant enemy shall not die by a single blow ; his destruction must be the work of time, of our whole life ; and the plan of warfare best suited to its design, and to our natures, is one which engages us to a constant repetition of wounds, under which he dies by inches.

We have often seen those who, when in comparative poverty, *were generous with their little, but who have become penurious in becoming rich.* While their means were small, their outgoes trod close upon their incomes; their habit of giving was exercised and strengthened in some proportion to that of receiving, and the passion for accumulating had not room to spread its roots. But when the gains began sensibly to advance beyond the outgoes, a habit was formed of calculating how long it would take to reach such and such a sum; and with no active principle of benevolence proportionally counterworking the growing passion for gains, every little increase served to feed the passion, and every call for charities was resisted, because it postponed the time of reaching the proposed amount to be laid in. Aware of this principle of human nature, divine wisdom has given the caution, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them;" hinting to us that the "setting of the heart upon them" is a common result of increase.

How many thousands have said in their hearts, O if I were as rich as such a one, how would I multiply the streams of my bounty; I would do nothing else than employ my wealth in doing good. But all such talk is vain; the process of becoming so rich would expose you to the fiercer heats of temptation, consuming all benevolent affections. The process of increasing wealth, without the outgoes of benevolence, is a process of confirming a feeling of poverty

a grasping desire for more, which like the grave will be ever crying, Give, give. A case has been known of a man at the age of threescore and ten, with his hundred thousand dollars, free from debt, and well invested, and yet crying like a child in apprehension of a possible experience of poverty. And this state of feeling was induced by a most natural process, by a mind given up to the passion of accumulating, without the counter-process of distributing. This is an invariable result of human experience in like circumstances, and it shows the importance of some law of conduct to keep our benevolent activities in use. Our condition is like that of a leaky vessel, which needs the constant labor of the pump in throwing out, to prevent its being submerged.

This fact in human nature should be well considered by *the young*, who are just entering upon a course of business, and upon the formation of character. Here is a powerful element in the production of character, which one cannot overlook without great damage to himself. Whether the young person regards his happiness and usefulness for time or for eternity, it is immensely important that he adopt this divinely appointed method of enlarging his heart.

And the church as a whole, and each professed Christian, has a special interest in this matter, because *covetousness is more especially the sin of the visible church*. It is so, because it is of such a nature that it can better conceal itself under a Christian

profession. Spurious conversions more often consist of a change of the dominion of one lust for that of another ; and as long as the heart remains unchanged, the lesser changes must consist in some substitution like this—an outward reformation must have its compensation in indulgences of inward lusts. It is no easy matter to be a drunkard, or profane, or dishonest, or licentious, and maintain a reputable standing among Christians ; but one may indulge his supreme love of the world in the form of covetousness, and yet maintain a specious semblance of religion, and a fair standing in the church : indeed, the church is quite too charitable towards her uncharitable members, and that because her own standard of beneficence is too low, and her own perceptions of Christian obligation in this matter are dim. There is now and then in human society what is called a *miser*—a man of large means, whose selfishness is so extreme, as to defeat its own purpose and inflict misery on himself. Such a one is held in general abhorrence, as a violator of the primitive law of society. Living only for himself, and refusing to contribute to the pleasures and advantage of society, he is by the common consent of men degraded to a lower order of beings ; men make themselves merry at his expense, and find amusement in discourse of his strange habits. But the man who, under more decent appearances, lives wholly to himself in the church of Christ, is even a more gross violator of the primitive law of

that society, and his character deserves no more indulgence. Yet, for the reasons which we have given, it finds a degree of indulgence ; and worldly minds in the church can indulge their covetousness, when they could not other forms of sin as gross ; and for the same reason, there are probably many in the church in supreme devotement to this form of sin, without being conscious of it. Hence, this sin should be the more guarded against in the church, by extending and confirming those habits of beneficence that counterwork it.

The grace of God first finds us in love of the world, inveterate, and supreme. It comes "teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." But its most effectual form of teaching this, is *by experience and active resistance*. It uses not only the word of instruction, but the power of action. All must be wrought into us, and wrought out by us. We cannot be put into the possession of a benevolent temper, and delivered from the tyranny of selfishness, by mere intellectual processes—by a mere presentation of reasons and inducements to benevolence. There is a work for the Holy Spirit ; and, under that, there is occasion for all the processes of the human mind, by which the temper and habits are changed. And in the gospel law of alms, every Christian is bound to address himself to the cultivation of the benevolent affections, as one great end of

life. Christ made it the duty of every one to pray, because his soul has need of all the quickening influences which prayer attracts ; and so he has made it the duty of every one to be constantly giving, because the heart has need of all these acts, for its own enlargement.

It is very possible, however, that some have never felt any want of the aid of such habits, and have never thought of giving as a means of crucifying the old man—just as many a prayerless man has never felt any need of those influences of the divine life which the good man secures by prayer. Of course, they have nothing in their own experience by which they can appreciate this Christian law of alms. They have no conflicts with the power of selfishness, because they have always been submissive to it. Such, however, would soon discover what is wanting, should they set this Christian rule before them, and endeavor to adopt it as the law of their conduct. Ye who have no need to cultivate a more benevolent heart, will of course find no reluctance to put in practice a rule of benevolence so reasonable. And if ye are reluctant, that reluctance is proof of your selfishness, and your need to enter a school of vigorous discipline. This reluctance is proof that you have need to exercise your heart to self-denials as constantly as the rule contemplates.



## 2. THIS SYSTEM OF BENEVOLENCE TENDS TO THRIFT.

Another reason why each one should enter upon these habits of systematic beneficence is, that God so attaches his blessing to them, that *even the temporal interests of the giver are usually promoted by them*. Out of the gifts of God to us, we bestow our gifts; and out of our gifts he brings the elements of our increase. There is here a circulation not unlike to that between the clouds and the earth watered by them. Suppose the clouds should withhold their gifts, and all the waters in the bottles of heaven should be hoarded there, for fear of exhaustion; the earth would soon become parched, and its lakes and rivers dry, and the supplies of rising vapor to fill the clouds would be diminished. But let the clouds freely dispense their treasures, and these treasures will have prompt returns.

In order to illustrate the principle that benevolence tends to thrift, let us now leave out of view every other purpose, and treat of the habit of giving simply as a means of benefiting ourselves. The Scriptures speak abundantly of this result. Take one example out of many, and one wherein temporal and spiritual benefit are intimately blended in the result. "He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully. Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for



the Lord loveth the cheerful giver; and God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye always, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound in every good work." The increase here promised is "all sufficiency in all things," to enable us to "abound in every good work." And as the giving of alms is one of the good works, a supply of the means for future gifts must here be included with the increase of grace which is promised. The imagery holds forth the idea of a rich soil, well prepared, and which requires only a generous dispensing of seed, in the shape of alms, to produce abundant increase of the seed sown. It tells us, that if we withhold the seed, we shall lose the advantage of a richly prepared soil; and if we dispense with a liberal hand, we shall have proportionately liberal returns. In other words, a wise and generous use of our property to charitable ends is, like the sowing of seed, a means of enriching ourselves, both spiritually and temporally.

That is, indeed, a narrow view which sees a reward in nothing but what terminates on ourselves. "None of us liveth to himself." The Christian blends his spiritual prosperity with that of the cause of his Redeemer. If he gives his money to carry and deposit the seed of the word in the most distant climes, and afterwards finds that that seed is bearing fruit sixty or a hundred-fold, he has his reward—that increase is a rich compensation for his money.

His own soul is enriched, both by sowing the seed and reaping the harvest. This is one of the most encouraging views of this work. By "dispersing abroad" and "giving to the poor," we "sow beside all waters," and deposit seeds which God watches over with delight. We have a wide and hopeful field on which to plant. And if the field be overgrown with briars and thorns, such agencies, under the divine economy, go along with the seed—such a powerful hand of a divine Cultivator prepares for it a place, that it will not return void.

"He that goeth forth bearing precious seed," goes in the strength of all the agencies that, in the economy of salvation, precede and enforce the word dispensed. And he that gives his alms to give wings to gospel truth, mingles his agencies with those of the Redeemer, labors in an enterprise which fills the heart of a God of mercy, which commands the ministry of angels, and which is sure to give glorious returns to all benevolent action. He casts his seed on a field where showers of grace are to fall, and over which the life-giving breath of the Spirit of God, like the winds of heaven, is to sweep. This is doing more than to give impulse to the most powerful human agencies. It is touching the springs of divine power, and securing results proportionate to that power. We also enter into the advantage of the precious nature of the seed sown. It is the living word of the living God, "the incorruptible seed,

which liveth and abideth for ever," which lives by an ever-expansive life, shooting forth new roots and branches, and yielding seed for new plantings, long after the hand that planted is laid in the grave.

By contributing to convey the gospel into contact with the minds of men, whether through the pulpit or press, we are sowing seeds for a *glorious harvest*. We are applying heaven's remedy to the deadly wounds of a world. True, some of the seed will be devoured by the fowls, some will be choked with thorns, and yet, in the general result, the sower will not be disappointed. The purpose and promise of God insures him. Thus saith the Lord, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be, that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void. But it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." God has "magnified his word above all his name." The more it has been dishonored hitherto, by a world's rejecting it, the more is he pledged to magnify and vindicate it in time to come. And among the great events yet to transpire upon the face of this world, no event, or series of events, will compare with the lustre of that in which God will bring forth to view the power and glory of his own truth.

Into this work we enter when we contribute for the sowing of this seed. We not only cultivate our own benevolence, in acts of giving, but in the participation of the hopes, and prayers, and efforts for a world's conversion, we are holding our hearts in communion with God, and enriching them with all divine communications.

But, in a narrower sense, these habits of giving tend to thrift, and *promote our temporal interests*. Jacob, in that crisis of his history when he was thrown out from his father's house, empty upon the world, with his whole fortune to make, made a vow, responsive to the heavenly vision which he had at Bethel, that of all that God should give him he would give a tenth. He adopted essentially the same rule which we here recommend—a rule which is within the reach of all. And how he prospered under it we are well informed. And, in the general result, it will be found that men will accumulate property faster under the rule of habitually giving a due proportion of their income, than they would without it. Nor does the fact that men often come into possession of property in disregard of this rule, show the contrary. For though men often acquire property without diligence, economy, or honesty, yet these virtues tend to thrift. So, all other things being equal, one may be said to be more sure to thrive with habits of beneficence than without them. Sometimes the reciprocity between the incomes and

outgoes is so manifest as to strike the most careless observer. Providence has a thousand ways of sustaining it.

Habits of giving favor the formation of other habits that tend to thrift. This rule operates as a law of conduct in the use of one's income, which excludes the waste made upon many frivolous, not to say hurtful gratifications. Most are wont to spend on needless things many small sums, whose aggregate is a large sum. But he who taxes his income to do good, soon finds in doing it a gratification greater than in all those little wasteful expenditures, and saves more than the amount of his charities. He has a better estimate of the value and use of money, and he feels a steadier impulse both to benevolence and to a wise economy. He has inserted into his mind a better regulator, and so saves what without it he would have wasted upon his vices. And not only his economy, but his industry, and indeed the whole sisterhood of thrifty virtues, are fostered by his habits of charity. Then these virtues, by a natural attraction, draw him into connections with others of like mind, and so secure him against temptations to wasteful expenditures.

This habit of benevolence also involves a *practical acknowledgment of God* and his blessing as the source of all thrift, which acknowledgment is a direct means of securing blessings. Then, as it is a general law of Providence that thrift shall follow

diligence, so it is a general law that thrift shall follow benevolence. There is in this what may be called a secondary rule of retributions, having relations to human society somewhat similar to those which the retributions of the last day have to the kingdom of God. God, when higher interests do not interfere, sustains a providential retribution in the secular affairs of men, that they may learn from others' experience how to regulate their own conduct. These retributions are conducted according to general laws, which exist for reasons similar to those for which he sustains the constancy of nature's works. Nature in all her processes is unvarying, that we may use her best by knowing and obeying her laws, that we may know before we try it, that fire will burn, and water will drown. And for a like reason, God maintains a law that the benevolent shall thrive. It is written in the book of his providences as well as in that of his revelation, "Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days." And there is nothing in human experience that gainsays it. There are indeed exceptions. For now and then God has some better and higher ends to answer, which require him in individual cases to suspend the rule.

That it is really a rule of divine Providence, is abundantly asserted in such scriptures as these: "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and the first fruits of all thine increase. So shall thy barns be

filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." "He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will He pay him again." "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed, for he giveth of his bread to the poor." "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now herewith, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." These scriptures have a meaning, and the meaning which they plainly express, and one which an observant eye will see verified in human experience. You hear God himself saying, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over." Thus is the liberality of men paid first in their own coin, and then paid again in the coin that goes current in heaven. While bad crops, bad debts, midnight fires, and the like disasters may soon consume what is gained by withholding more than is meet.

But you will ask, If this principle have been in operation, why is not the wealth of the world concentrated in the hands of the benevolent, or of the



church? One reason is, that there has been with professed Christians a sad want of habits of testing the power of this principle. When the Jews were under a blight and curse for withholding their tithes, their poverty was no disproof of the principle. And the like to some extent may be said of us. But there is another view. Christianity usually begins to work on the lower strata of society, and thence works upward, with a steady elevating influence on all. Leaving the mountains of hoarded wealth, she comes to preside over the countless agencies that work for the elevation of the humbler classes. Her influence in this particular may be best seen as exerted on a whole community. For instance, the foundations of New England were laid by self-sacrificing men, whose "deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality." With smallest ability, they secured the best means of mental and spiritual culture then had in all the world. And they did it in a spirit of self-sacrifice for the honor of God. And all this was done in the rigors of a life in a newly opened forest. The gifts of gold and precious stones which they contributed to adorn their tabernacle of God, were gifts made while dwelling in the wilderness. And to that wise generosity every subsequent year has been bringing in returns in secular advantages. The present vigor of the New England character, and all that it has achieved for this country and the world, is traceable to that liberality.

And there are luminous illustrations of our principle wherever the descendants of the pilgrims are found.

But if any doubt the soundness of the principle, they have an easy and satisfactory way of resolving their doubts. Let them try it. Let them begin by giving a due proportion of their income for charities, and observing the result. There would be less of doubt if there were more experiments. But there have been some examples of those who, in some good degree, have lived not to themselves. Most of these, occupying humbler stations, have been little noticed; yet their record is on high. But some have stood forth conspicuous, both in wealth and liberality; and also as illustrations of the principle, that "he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Andrew Fuller says the poor people of Glasgow used to say, "David Dale gives his money by sho'elsful, and God Almighty sho'els it back again."

### 3. THE SUPERIOR EFFICIENCY OF THIS SYSTEM.

It belonged to divine wisdom to lay the plan for raising supplies for the wars of the cross—the plan for gathering from a people, few, scattered, and poor, as the first Christians were, the funds for the wide propagation of the gospel. And the plan which divine wisdom devised for this purpose is above the products of human wisdom in its measure, as much as is the plan of salvation by the cross. In its sim-

plicity, there is a comprehensive and far-reaching skill. In its seeming foolishness, there is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

Let us contemplate this rule of beneficence given by Paul under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as a part of the system employed to gather resources for the first propagation of the gospel. Here was, so to speak, a great and expensive war to be sustained. The little company of Christians were about to engage with the powers of darkness, entrenched in the strongholds of heathen Rome. Jehovah had summoned them to conquer the empire that had conquered the world; and he gave them a plan for raising the supplies, that was equal to the emergency. He saw that if all Christians, as fast as they became such, adopted this rule of Sabbath-gifts, the war would be self-supporting in its progress and cumulative in its energy. Look then at the merits of this rule, considered simply as a part of a system of finance for such a vast enterprise.

And let not *its great simplicity* conceal its merits; for this itself is one of its great advantages, betokening its divine origin. All that comes from God unites simplicity with comprehensive utility and grandeur. And this, unlike the complex systems of national finance, requires not the profound skill of the statesman to execute it. Its simplicity puts it into the hand of the merest child; it makes each person a treasurer for the Lord, and appoints his conscience a

collector of the weekly dues, and disbursing agent to meet all demands upon the treasury. The great wisdom of the plan consists much in this, that so many and great ends are secured by a provision so simple, so easily and universally applicable.

Nearly allied to this feature is that of its great *economy*. Most systems of finance consume a large percentage of the funds in the expense of collecting ; and the same is true of our benevolent agencies. But the universal adoption of this rule will, as we have seen, save what is now a great loss, which we suffer as the penalty of our neglect of the heaven-taught plan. We may, if we will, retain our old habit of passive giving under casual appeals, and pay for working the machinery that gives the impulses ; but if one and all should adopt the system which makes each a vigilant and conscientious treasurer for the Lord, there would be, through the length and breadth of Zion, an omnipresent and spontaneous inflow, every cent of which would be available to the main purpose.

Then this rule *secures us against ruinous burdens*. Our revolutionary statesmen were often at their wit's end to find how to get adequate supplies for so exhausting a war without absorbing the means and alienating the hearts of the people. But in this war of the cross, the wealth of the people from whom the supplies must come is in still less proportion to the wants ; yet here is a rule of finance which,

if fully adopted, would fill the treasury, and leave every contributor none the poorer and more attached to the cause; for its whole tendency is to nourish and cultivate our love to the cause, to widen and deepen the fountains of our benevolent feeling, while it guards against laying heavy burdens, by leaving each to judge of his own obligations.

The *equity* of the rule is another advantage of it in a financial view. Paul says, "I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality." In respect to the equality of the pressure of the burdens, the universal adoption of this rule would effect a great change. Now the main burden is borne by a part of those whom it concerns. Probably one half of professing Christians contribute nothing. And it deserves to be considered, whether their neglect has not, at least in part, come from our neglect of the scriptural mode of laying the demands upon them—from our neglect to convince them that there is such a specific and universal law of benevolence binding upon them. But if this rule of Christian finance could be restored, and set in the place where the Holy Spirit has put it, every Christian's conscience might be reached. Let those who are now in a habit of giving, contribute by their example to make it a common law of Christian life that

each shall keep his treasury for Christ, and the time will soon come, when it will not be easy to hold a fair repute among Christians while avoiding every pecuniary burden of the Christian cause. Why is it a matter of common law in the church, that all professing Christians shall habitually partake of the communion? That is not more expressly and repeatedly enjoined in the Bible than this duty. But there is in the case of the Lord's supper a specific rule generally acknowledged. Let such a rule be generally acknowledged as to acts of beneficence, and it is easy to see how the restoration of this rule would tend to equalize the burden and work.

But the inculcation of this rule is desirable not so much for the purpose of equalizing the burdens, as for *multiplying the bearers* of them. If it be true, that one-half of professing Christians, to say nothing of others, are practically disowning their obligations to give alms of such things as they have for evangelizing the world, some means not now in use are requisite to awake the public conscience where it slumbers. What is wanted, in order that the work should advance with the requisite rapidity and all-pervading energy, is, that *every individual* of the church should be an actual coworker in it—that every church, lesser or larger; that every family, rich or poor; that every individual Christian; yea, every one who means to maintain a practical sense of allegiance to Christ, shall become a regular

source of supply. And it is natural to ask, In what way shall this result be secured? The present mode of presenting the claims of Christ upon his church, has, for the last quarter of a century, made little progress in this direction. The proportion of persons in the church who contribute next to nothing, has scarcely diminished in that time. It is hence plain that some different mode of reaching the public conscience is requisite. And who will say that this requisite lies not in a restoration of this apostolic rule? If those who now sustain habits of beneficence were to adopt the rule, and in their practice to commend it to the public mind as an acknowledged law of Christian life, it would soon acquire a living, moral force upon the public conscience, such as it cannot have while it is treated with neglect, and such as it would not be easy to resist. For who does not see, that a requirement taking this specific and imperative form, and laying its grasp on "*every one*," would reach many that cannot be reached by a mere general exhortation to benevolence. Every one, indeed, thinks himself already benevolent, after some sort. Every one thinks he is in a degree complying with the spirit of the general requirements, even if he give not a cent a year. But ask him to do this thing *in this way*, and he will see that you require what he is not doing. Tell him that God requires him to do it in this way. Let him see that the church are practically regarding this rule as binding



on each and all, and that in his neglect of it, he is as much setting aside a law of the divine life as he would be in the neglect of daily prayer, and you would reach his conscience with a force entirely new. So it strikes us, that here is the remedy for that widespread neglect of this branch of Christian obligation over which Zion mourns. Give to this specific rule of beneficence the binding force of a living command of God, addressed to every man; let it live and breathe and speak through the common practice of those who sustain the work of evangelizing, and very soon all professing Christians would either adopt the rule, or disburden the church of their connection with it.

It also gives omnipresence and ceaseless *activity to the collecting agencies*. It saves the expenses of itinerant agents by establishing a local agency in every man's mind, and so commanding the gratuitous services of a thousand agents where it dismisses one. It gives to each conscience an agent's commission, a pulpit to occupy, a sermon to preach, and a collection to take up every Sabbath. And as every Christian's conscience is supposed to be quickened and guided by the ever-present Spirit of God, these countless agents are supposed to act under the guidance and control of one central mind. So that the universal adoption of this rule would secure a countless host of collecting agents, all acting harmoniously under the omnipresent agency of the Spirit

of Christ. Seen from this view, this system has a simplicity and grandeur unrivalled.

And then no odium attaches to these collecting agencies. Having learned the excellence of the work of gathering treasures for beneficence, we are in the best way to be reconciled to such agencies. If an appointed agent of some benevolent society were, like Paul, to come to receive the gatherings made before he came, we should receive him as an angel of mercy. Now, when an agent comes, some give him a cold reception, because they think he wants *their* money; but if they had first commenced acting under their appointment as the Lord's treasurers, having a portion of *his* funds in charge, they would welcome the agent as a convenient bearer of the Lord's funds to the point of their destination.

In some rare cases, this rule is needed as a check on those who, giving from casual impulse, give more than they ought. Some may perhaps do injustice to themselves and families, by an inconsiderate profusion of their gifts. One excellent minister's wife said, that she rejoiced that her husband had adopted this rule, because she was now sure that his gifts would be regulated by his deliberate judgment, and not exceed his ability. And if the reader has a like amiable weakness, here is his protection. Let all your gifts go first into the Lord's treasury, kept in your own house; then, when a case of want appeals

to you, the simple question will be, how much of that portion of the Lord's money under your hand you ought to appropriate to that case. And when demands are made for undeserving objects, or when you are tempted to give, as the easiest way to dispose of a troublesome applicant, the question will be, Shall I take this portion of my Lord's money, which is sacred to his uses, and thus throw it away?

This rule also aids to a discrimination between what are, and what are not objects of charity. There is such a gradual shading off between gifts in charity and gifts for other purposes, that we are likely to credit ourselves too much on the score of charity, unless we have first made it a rule to take every gift in charity out of a fund already distinctly appropriated to the Lord. In that case, we should avoid underrating our obligations through our overestimate of our actual gifts.

This financial rule works admirably, in producing *large results from small means*, in that it both generates wealth where it gathers it, and makes massive ingots out of the carefully-garnered grains and dust of gold. A financier for a nation plans to gather into the public treasury the needed percentage of the existing wealth of the people. But Paul's plan of finance was laid to work where wealth was not—among those required to labor, working with their hands, that they might have to give to him that needeth. God has not set in progress a kingdom of

poor men, and put it upon a work that involves great expenses, without putting it upon a course of action that will furnish the supplies. This is done by graduating the value of the gift of each by the ability and sacrifice of the giver—by putting the widow's farthing as high as the rich man's pound; thus making sure of the small grains, that will grow into the mass of a mountain. As it is not the dash of a single water-spout here and there that fertilizes the broad bosom of the earth, but the countless little drops falling thick and fast over the whole surface, so it is with the accumulations of evangelical finance. The wonderful capacity of that system lies in its power of generating and gathering up the minute grains, till they produce effective funds; and the secret of the power which brings forth even the smallest gifts, lies in the consideration given to the smallest gifts proceeding from the love of Christ. The plan which puts the poor man's cent on a par with the rich man's dollar, generates funds where there are none, gathers the thick and pregnant cloud from accumulations of vapor too thin to be visible. It enables the poor to join in making many rich.

But we have not the whole of this idea, till we have seen how this system *increases the giver's ability*. Other systems only transfer a portion of the people's wealth to the public treasury; but this goes in among the contributors, and disciplines them to economy, diligence, temperance, and all the virtues

that tend to thrift, and so generates more wealth than it gathers. If the poor man wishes to enter upon a thrifty course, he does well to begin where Jacob did, when, an exile and a penniless wanderer, he lodged in Bethel, with a rock for his pillow and heaven for his canopy, and when he made that vow, "Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee." It is no miracle, but the ordinary process of providence, that makes this habit of returning a portion of God's gifts contribute to our wealth. And this process of providence challenges our observation as much as the miracle by which the widow's handful of meal and cruse of oil wasted not, according to the word of the Lord.

A special beauty of this system is, that whatever it brings into the Lord's treasury, it brings by means most purely *voluntary*. There is not even the compulsion of eloquent appeals to sympathy. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and will have his conquests made with no forced supplies. He will have the energy of his cause sustained by the concurrence of willing hearts. For this reason, he frowns on all attempts to sustain his gospel in its purity by compulsory means. Those battles of the warrior which are with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, may well be sustained by supplies raised by force. Before them is the garden of Eden, and behind them a wilderness. But Zion's King seeks this as his especial honor, that when his conquests shall be complete,

and the world shall have welcomed his sceptre, it may be seen that all the supplies of his armies have come from the spontaneous gifts and the loyal hearts of his people. He has a right, indeed, to make forced loans; for in them he would only be drawing upon his own funds, since the silver and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, are his. And he does in many ways force an unwilling service from hearts and hands that intend it not. Yet his wisdom has appointed, respecting the carrying forth of the gospel to the benighted, that through your mercy they shall obtain mercy—that thus faith shall come by hearing the preachers of your sending. He will have it appear in the grand result, that the very essence of his kingdom and its self-expansive power, consists in that love to God and man which has expression in gifts for the spread of salvation. And that mode of benevolent action most intimately harmonizes with his plans, which is most purely spontaneous on behalf of his people cworking with him.

Another desideratum in public finances is, that the supplies shall be *steady and reliable*. And were this plan generally adopted, there would be no need of the expenses of our evangelizing societies running beyond their income—no need for extra and spasmodic efforts to throw off a crushing debt; for the income would be a steady stream, supplied by countless everflowing springs.

Another advantage of the rule is, that it has that

in its own structure and use which *disarms objections*. If one absolutely refuses tribute to Christ, and denies that he has any money-account to keep with him, he has indeed no use for it; but let any one admit his obligation to give alms of such things as he has, and he can give no valid reason why he should not do it in the way which this rule describes. If alms-giving be no part of your religion—if you think that your having been “bought with a price” confers no pecuniary obligations, you must be left to settle your accounts with the Redeemer at the final reckoning. But those who think alms-giving as much a duty as prayer or honesty, have here a rule which God has given for its performance. It claims their adoption by divine authority, and by reason of its intrinsic excellence and manifold advantages. And any one who refuses to adopt it, may be asked to bring against it a reasonable objection. Is it, that it would bind you to do more than you are able? The terms of the rule show the contrary. Is it, that your ability is small, and your gifts would be inconsiderable? It was for just such cases that the rule was more especially made. Is it, that you cannot always be sure of having the money in hand at the time? That is not needful. Is it, that you cannot so often judge of your ability? You *do* as often judge of your ability, in graduating your ordinary expenditures. Do you say that many have gone well through life without such a rule? Now, a command of God



which has slumbered for a thousand years is coming to life, and you will do well to heed it.

Furthermore, this plan of finance exceeds all others *in its enforcements*. In these the great Contriver employs his infinite wisdom, and shows his control of the springs of our minds. He proposes an end to be accomplished *upon ourselves* by what we give to him; and he asks our gifts, not so much because he or his cause needs them, as that he may have them as proofs of our self-devotement to him. He comes, not so much to awaken our sympathies for the suffering, as to constrain us by the love of Christ. When he calls us to beneficence, he speaks not so much of the sufferings of man, as of the mercies of Christ. He says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." And by a substitution, warranted by his having stood as surety for a dying world—his having come to seek and save the lost, and his having made the lost his own—he says, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me." So he causes the wants of the world to plead with us out of his own mouth, and to plead all that he has done for us, and all the claims which he has upon us. And the whole is backed by eternal sanctions. He does not bind this law upon us with civil pains and penalties. If men prefer to set aside his claims, and snatch and hoard all that he gives them, he holds his peace for the

time. It may be, he lets the stream of his bounty flow on, and lets them pass with credit among men, and without censure in the church. But in a coming day he will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

This rule then commends itself to our adoption by its superior efficiency as a mode of financial action. It was evidently appointed by divine wisdom, not only because of its being best adapted to cultivate a benevolent character, but because best adapted to increase the amount given in charity.

It opens a way in which the poor can contribute a considerable amount. Indeed, there is no other way for a large class of Christians, many of whom are the excellent of the earth, the true nobility, to bear any considerable part in the most excellent of all enterprises. The amount which they can give at any one time, without the previous process of laying aside a little now and a little then, is so small, that they would be discouraged from attempting any thing. But let this rule be adopted in the church, and restored to its proper place, and secure a general concurrence in it, and you will vastly multiply the hearts and hands engaged to swell the general amount. The single deposits of each will be small; but even the poorest at the year's end will bring you a handsome donation. And the aggregate donations of the poor will surpass all previous expectations. Of those whose means are smallest, there are

some who, taught by an instinctive benevolence and sagacity, have adopted *the substance* of this rule as their only means of procuring their share in the luxury of beneficence, and are now actually laying aside their penny at a time, to nurse it up to the pound, to be devoted to the cause of Christ. But while this is true of some, the greater part are discouraged and excluded, in our exclusion of God's appointed rule, which is their deed of partnership in the enterprise. A restoration of this rule would then bring at once a strong reinforcement to the army for subduing this world to Christ.

But the reinforcements would come not alone from the poor. Let this rule be recovered from oblivion, and let it come to be a universally admitted truth, that every Christian is bound to obey it, as much as he is bound to keep the Sabbath, and the habits of a large portion of professed Christians will be revolutionized.

But the greatest increase will be from the operation of the rule on those who now sustain the burden of these enterprises. Let them come under a regular system, and from week to week set apart a portion "as God has prospered them," and they will soon find themselves giving more, with less of seeming sacrifice. They will come out at the year's end with much greater amounts deposited in the treasury of the Lord, and with their own funds not lessened by that increase. They will find their beneficence,

as it has become a matter of more frequent recurrence, and more constant business, to have become also a matter of more substantial satisfaction; thus, more will be done with more pleasure, and with more ability for doing it.

Here then is a method by which, if the church is willing to obey a simple and plain command of her Lord, a vast increase may be secured to the means of evangelizing the world. And this fact pleads with unlimited power, when we reflect to what rich account all means can now be turned—when we reflect that the whole world is one inviting field of missionary labor—that Bibles will be received and used as fast as they can be made and given—that preachers will find a hearing in as great numbers as they can be sent—that colporteurs might advantageously be increased a hundred-fold, and that Christian presses might find employment in unlimited numbers. This is the time to sow abundantly beside all waters, and if there is any principle of action, that can put us in possession of ten-fold the present incomes of our evangelizing societies, we want it now.

#### 4. EXAMPLE OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

The example of the primitive church may instruct us in this duty. The type of benevolence that appeared in the pentecostal revival, was nobly sustained in the church for several ages. The church first gathered at Jerusalem being scattered abroad, went

everywhere preaching the word and kindling the fires of their own zeal and love ; and apostles testified of the new churches reared in Gentile nations, that "their deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality," and that they extended their gifts even "beyond their power." Next to bringing their own minds into captivity to the obedience of Christ, their chief care was the conversion of others.

The history of the first two centuries of Christianity abounds with remarkable facts, showing with what zeal and entireness of soul, the church went into the work of converting the world. Those who perilled their lives and suffered the loss of all things *in preaching*, were not the only ones who made sacrifices for the spread of the gospel. Some spent all besides a bare support of themselves, to furnish the means of evangelizing others ; those who had no property gave the avails of their labor ; and it is recorded of one man that he sold himself as a slave to a heathen family, to get access to them for their conversion, and for years cheerfully endured the labor and condition of a slave till he succeeded with the whole family, and took his liberty from the gratitude of the converts. The same person, on a visit to Sparta, again entered himself as a slave in the family of the governor of Sparta and served two years, and again succeeded in his design. The fires of such a benevolence, burning wherever a company of Christians was gathered, could not fail soon to overspread

the world, and in the space of one generation most of the nations then known to the civilized world, were more or less evangelized. And if such a tone of benevolent action could be now restored to the church, another generation would not pass before the earth would be "full of the knowledge and glory of God, as the waters cover the sea."

And *their kindness to the poor was boundless*. Christians felt as much bound to this as to prayer, or to the hearing of the gospel. Contributions and actual exertions for their relief, were made indispensable parts of Sabbath exercises. At the close of public worship, lists of the needy, the widows and orphans, were produced and considered, and additions were made from time to time as new cases occurred; and the wants of these were supplied from the funds gathered by free contributions. No heart-stirring appeals were needed to awake dormant sympathies. The spontaneous flowings of the fountains of their benevolence supplied every stream. There were no hospitals for the poor and sick except of their creating, and few of the heathen ever entered abodes of suffering on errands of mercy. The Christians supported not only their own needy, but bore the burden which hardness of heart in their heathen neighbors cast upon them; and the zeal with which they entered into every labor of love is well-nigh incredible. Ladies of highest rank acted as nurses for the sick, exposing themselves to contagions, and devoting

their purse, their toil, their prayers, and their instructions, to pour consolation into the cells of extremest wretchedness. It was a day when scenes of wretchedness specially abounded—when the world was often visited by famines and pestilences, and the heathen had become shockingly corrupt in morals, and desperate and reckless under the fearful visitations of heaven; and the miracles of Christian benevolence shone brighter through the darkness, and contrasted strangely with the cold indifference of the heathen towards their nearest friends. For instance, in the time of Cyprian, the plague came upon Carthage with fearful and protracted visitations. The heathen abandoned their sick and dying. The highways were strewn with corpses which none dared to bury. But Christians faced every danger, and often sacrificed life in alleviating sufferings and burying the dead, whether of Christians or heathen. While, among the heathen, parents deserted their own children, and children trampled on unburied corpses of parents.

But one of the greatest taxes on primitive benevolence was laid by *persecution*, which now and then went through the church like a tempest. No sooner did the report go abroad that a fellow-Christian was in a dungeon, than crowds of Christians came around the prison-doors begging admission, meekly bearing the insults of surly guards, and using every means to procure the prisoner's release. Some would beset



the prison-walls days and nights, praying for the deliverance, or the triumphant death of the imprisoned martyrs. When any were doomed to waste their lives in toil in distant and unwholesome mines, contributions were sent for their relief, by the hands of those who undertook long journeys to convey the sympathies and offerings of the church. To show the temper of the times, a party set out from Egypt in the depth of winter, to relieve some brethren in the mines of Cilicia. They came to Cesarea, and there the heathen seized a part of them, put out their eyes, and horribly mutilated them. But in spite of such dangers, such journeys were often performed. No floods of persecution could quench the desire to convey consolation to those suffering for Christ's sake. And those who lived to return and tell what they had seen of martyrs in the mines—how they toiled, and bore their chains, and honored their Redeemer, were loaded with many honors.

To supply resources for this great variety of pressing calls for charity, there was the Sabbath contribution, commenced by order of Paul, in which all, rich and poor, concurred. Then, in case of great public calamities, the people held fasts, and gave to the church what they saved by abstinence from food. In pressing emergencies, the plate which the church had acquired in more prosperous days was melted down and sold. Others bound themselves to set apart a certain portion of their income; others held

periodical fasts, devoting the saving thereby to the church. Some wealthy individuals, when converted, sold their whole estates, and betook themselves to manual labor for their own support. Others managed their estates, devoting the whole income to the cause.

Indeed, so much did the first Christians excel in acts of charity, that these constituted their peculiar characteristic, and the wonder of the heathen world. If the church had any thing whereof to boast, it was this. This is illustrated by the well-known act of the deacon of the church at Rome, in the time of the emperor Decius. The tyrant demanded that the treasure of the church should be surrendered. The deacon required one day's time to gather it. In that time, he assembled all the blind, lame, sick, and poor, that were supported by the church, and then called in the emperor, and said, these are the treasures of the church! In the time of Chrysostom, the church under his care had on its catalogue of sick and poor, three thousand regular beneficiaries, besides extraordinary applications every day for assistance.

Indeed, so glorious and impressive was the robe of Christian charity worn by the primitive church, that Julian the apostate, seeking to effect in his day a resurrection of the prostrate heathen institutions endeavored to put this robe upon paganism, expecting that it would, like the bones of Elisha, give life

to the dead. Here is the ever-memorable testimony of that crafty and politic emperor : " Let us consider that nothing has so much contributed to the progress of the superstition of Christians, as their charity to strangers. I think we ought to discharge this obligation ourselves. Establish hospitals in every place. For it would be a shame for us to abandon our poor, while the Jews have none, and the impious Galileans provide not only for their own poor, but also for ours."

## CONCLUSION.

Place, now, distinctly before the mind, what, if we have rightly read the New Testament, the Lord requires of you, be your property less or more. It is, that you shall now commence, if you have not already, a habit of *setting apart a portion of your income on the Sabbath, or at other stated times*, for charitable uses, regulating with a generous heart and a good conscience the amount appropriated by the ability which God shall give you. Knowing this to be a plain requirement of Christ, can you hesitate? If you can, you are not able to say, " The love of Christ constraineth us." Indeed, what right of choice have you in the case? " Ye are not your own : ye are bought with a price," and are bound to " glorify God," not only with your money, but with " your body and your spirit, which are his." " Ye are bought with a price"—" not with corruptible things, as sil

ver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." Where Christ asks your silver, he has given his blood. Do you realize that he has borne the curse for you, and snatched you from the gates of hell? And yet, have you no generous emotions when he asks for these gifts, in token of your love? Do you forget the mercy of "our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich?" And now that through his poverty you are becoming rich, or think you are, now that the riches of his grace begins to flow in upon your soul, and God is endowing you with the wealth of the divine nature, and he comes to you in the person of his poor, and asks for a portion of his own gifts to be returned, have you a heart to deny him? After all your hopes and professions, is this the real temper of your mind? Look the thing in the face again. By becoming poor, he has made you rich; and in his poverty, which pleads in the mouth of his poor, he asks you to return enough of the gifts which he has put into your hand, to serve as a substantial token of your grateful love. And have you no heart to give it? We ask you, then, just to realize what is the state of your heart. We ask, how dwelleth the love of God in you? We ask you to realize with whom you are dealing, and to whom he will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Furthermore, this mode of consecrating our prop

erty to Christ was included in the terms of our oath of allegiance, or surrender to him. That surrender included all that we are and have. Any thing short of this would not bring us into covenant with God. And if we have really covenanted with him, we stand pledged by oath to make such a use of our property. And as far as we are coming short of this, are we not keeping back a part when we had sworn to devote the whole? And how does this differ from the sin of Ananias and Sapphira?

But you say, perhaps, that the great body of professed Christians, and those of reputable standing have gone through life without any such rule of action, and why should more be required of you? "The times of this ignorance God winked at." A veil rested upon the minds of most respecting this matter; but the views of the Christian world are in the process of a great change. As new enterprises have been thrown upon our hands, new light has come into our minds. We now begin to see this thing as it is, and are now without the excuse which our fathers had. We are in a state of transition to positions of purer light and more scriptural benevolence; and soon the church will look upon neglect of this rule as we now look upon preceding ages, that for a thousand years gave scarcely a dollar for the conversion of heathen. We trust the time is not distant, when the professed Christian who has no habit and system of alms-giving, will be regarded in the church

as the miser now is in society. This living to one's self, and withholding from Christ, will be as odious as is now the trade of the swindler.

But perhaps some will still say, that they admit the obligation to practise a generous charity, but they hold that the gospel leaves every one to decide for himself how much he ought to give; and why not let each one decide as to the mode of giving? Why insist so much on its being done in this particular way? You might say the same about the duty of Sabbath-keeping. You admit the obligation to preach and hear and pray and praise; but why insist on its being done on that particular day? We could in both cases give many reasons. But this is enough, that God has commanded it; and the command to do this work of charity on the Sabbath, or at other stated times, is as explicit as the command to keep the Sabbath. Some individuals might devote as many hours to spiritual exercises, if there were no Sabbath; and some individual might give as much in charity, if there were no law requiring this stated appropriation of portions of income. But to make the matter sure with all, divine wisdom has made this appointment, and who are we, that we set it aside?





